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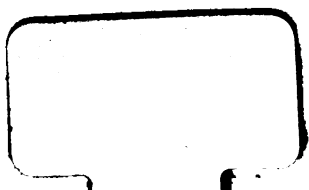
By

**W. J. Fischer**

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*Yours Very Sincerely*  
*Dr. William J. Fischer.*

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By Dr. WILLIAM J. FISCHER

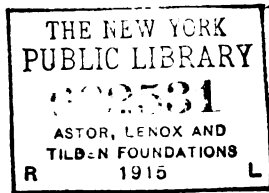


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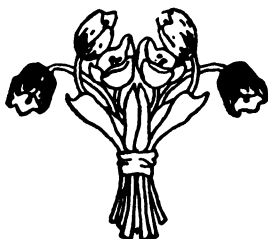
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NOY WAM  
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To  
BERNICE ANGELA,  
the Author's Little  
JUNE ROSE



FEAST OF ST. AGNES, 1911



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## Chapter I—One Evening at Stanford.

Stanford was a very busy Canadian city, always bristling with activity and excitement. Travelers at all times had a good word for it, and, go where you might, everybody seemed to know Stanford, and that it was a city of factories, foundries and mills, and that nearly a hundred chimney-shafts pointed heavenward and sent their smoke into the air from dawn until sunset.

Stanford claimed the distinction of manufacturing anything from a button to a huge, powerful engine. The large woolen mills that stood in the heart of the city were the delight of every one, not only in that they gave employment to over six hundred men but because the name of Charles Dudley Mathers, who owned them, had been connected with all that had been just and honorable. In the hearts of the poor, especially, was his name treasured like some holy thing, and no one knew the extent of his charity save his Creator. Thrice he had been elected to the mayor's chair by his fellow citizens and on all occasions he had discharged the

duties of his office faithfully and conscientiously.

But a storm was brewing—a terrible storm—which sooner or later was to devastate his whole career. Business embarrassments had been threatening, and now there were complications in his affairs, and his commercial interests were steadily weakening. He had made several investments in the vain hope of bettering his condition, but alas! all attempts proved futile. Blow followed blow, and each time it smote him with greater force until he was financially crippled. Then came failure—black as a starless night—and forever shut out the sunlight in his day. From that moment Charles Mathers was a changed man, and, when his creditors closed the doors of the Stanford mills, they also closed the portals of his heart against the low, incessant, monotonous murmurs of a world that was cold and empty to him now.

Always of a bright, sunny disposition, he was now dull and apathetic, verging on the melancholic state. In a short time he became only a shadow of his former self. He shunned company and would sit for a whole day at his window and move his lips only to let sigh after sigh escape. His wife, who had always been his inspiration, vainly tried to restore the smile to his pallid face. One could al-

most see him failing—his vitality was fast ebbing low. He contracted a cold which settled upon his lungs. Pneumonia and a protracted convalescence led to phthisis. His weakened tissues could not combat the powerful toxæmia that was raging within. It was a great struggle and finally, after a very long and wearisome illness, the power, that had for years run the Stanford mills, succumbed to the inevitable—and many hearts were sad for the passing.

Six years had elapsed since Mr. Mathers' death when this story opens. Mrs. Mathers had not borne the sadness of the trial very well. She and her child—a boy of twelve—had not been separated a day in all their lives, but the hour of parting was soon to come. Thoughts of that leave-taking were even then tracing the deep lines of suffering on Mrs. Mathers' face as she sat on the veranda with Charles by her side, one evening late in August.

In the West the twilight sat palaced in an array of gorgeous clouds, and the dark pines that bordered the lone, stone driveway stood silhouetted against the red sky, like sextons ringing the death-knell for the dying day. Upon a willow a sparrow was calling for its mate and, within a stone's throw from where the two were sitting, the splashing waters of

the great fountain made sweet music for tired hearts.

Mrs. Mathers raised her head slightly and for a moment her eyes were full of tears. Then she revived her courage and said cheerfully: "Well, Charles, tomorrow you leave for college. I know I will miss you, my dear, but 'tis all for the best. You will like it, I am sure, and you will make many new friends in that little world which you are about to enter. There will be some little difficulties, to be sure, that will try your perseverance and patience, but firmness and strength will be given you when most needed, my child. I rejoice to think that the day is near at hand."

Mrs. Mathers really felt glad for had she not made a promise, when Charles was but a babe in her arms, that she would give him a good, thorough education? It was her one ambition to see him well brought up and perhaps some day have him take his place among the great men of the world. Her every thought, her whole life was wrapped up in her child. How often she asked God, when sickness brought death very close to the thin little body, to spare him for her sake. And He had spared him until now, and she was grateful, for tomorrow's sun was to bring her the realization of her most

sacred wish. The six years, that had elapsed since her husband's death, had made a rather heavy call upon her purse. Many old debts had to be met and she paid them partly with money that had come in with insurance on her husband's life. But there was still a little left, and after all she would not mind, if the worst came, drifting to the alm's house in the end. She would feel that she had done her best to carry out her wish.

The bright red tints of the western sky had faded. Dark, lengthening, purple shadows were creeping along the horizon, and, one by one, the stars peeped out and threw their radiant gleams over the city, like so many little bright angels of the Most High. A hush had come over all—a silence that was good for aching hearts. Only a passing wind disturbed the sacred peace of the evening hour. One could almost hear the throbbings of nature's own wild heart, so intense was the stillness.

Mrs. Mathers moved slightly and ran her fingers caressingly through her son's dark locks and said in a low, sweet voice: "And now, Charles, tell me what place you would like to take in this great, active world?"

The boy raised his eyes to his mother. There was a look of intense joy in them—a somewhat strange look, such as she had



never seen before. The moonlight shone full upon his face and, when his lips parted, they gave birth to a smile.

"Mother! I have only one desire—one wish, but I'm afraid I'm not good enough. I want to be a priest like Father Flynn. I want to be good to the poor and the orphans like he is. Oh! I would so like to become a priest if I could?"

"A priest?" interrupted his mother, somewhat nervously. She was surprised, but gladly so. It was the first time in her life that she had asked the boy this question and he could not have given her an answer dearer to her heart.

"I am glad, Charles," she said at last, "that your wishes run toward so holy a vocation. Nothing would please me more than to see you ministering to God's poor and orphans, who too often long for the sound of a kind, encouraging word and receive only jeers and words of cold derision. You are young, Charles, but I will pray that God will favor your choice."

For some time Mrs. Mathers gazed into the gathering night. The strands of gray hair, which the years had whitened prematurely, were silvery in the moonlight. Her lips moved slightly, and she dreamed of that bright day in the far off future, in the

splendor of which her son was to come to her as one of God's anointed and lay his hands upon her head in priestly blessing. Oh! what happiness lay in waiting in the lap of that precious future, if her dream should ever come true!

"Good night, my boy," she said kindly, as she kissed his red cheeks at the bed-room door. "I hope you will sleep well. We have a long day ahead of us tomorrow."

Then the door closed gently. Now that Charles was alone with himself, he felt a sadness creep over him. His eyes fell upon a large open trunk before him. All day long a busy mother had been packing it. Then he turned to the wall. Ah! she had forgotten something. In a moment the picture was down. It was a little painting in oil of his parents, and the boy kissed it tenderly.

"Poor father! poor mother!" he whispered to himself as he carefully placed the picture in his trunk, "I know I shall often feel lonely when I am gone from home, and then, little picture, you will bring my parents very near."

Then he sank upon his knees beside the trunk and wept convulsively, and long his eyes rested on that painted treasure. When he at length fell asleep, the midnight lamps in the blue skies were still burning, and long

the moonbeams stole in through the curtains  
to dry the tears on his cheek and brighten  
the smile that played over his face in his  
slumbers.



## Chapter II.—Mrs. Atherton's Promise.

Charles awoke quite early next morning. A flood of golden sunshine burst from the portals of morn, through the white lace curtains, and threw grotesque shadows everywhere, and long his eyes followed the frolic of the sunbeams on the wall. When he had dressed he strolled down the driveway, and on his lips lingered the words of a song his old nurse had sung to him many a years:—

“Sing high! Sing low!  
While winds do blow,  
Let's run the fields together,  
And tune to glee,  
Our hearts so free,  
In ev'ry kind of weather!

“Sing high! Sing low!  
The moments go  
And pleasures swift are fleeting;  
But sweet thy lay,  
O happy day,  
Thou singest me in greeting!”

The fountain nearby sparkled in the sunlight, and several white doves gayly flapped their wings in the cooling waters. When

Charles drew near they cooed lustily and flew upon his outstretched arm. They were very tame, and as he stood there, he wondered if the little white doves would really miss him when he was gone. He had been a kind master to them, and many happy hours he had spent with them, and now it seemed to him as if his heart's kingdom was all of a sudden to lose all its richest treasures. The little things of life? One does not appreciate them half enough while they last, and only when the parting comes one seems to know their real value—but then it is too late.

Charles had always loved these innocent little birds, and as they turned their heads and opened their small eyes so wistfully, his heart gave a sickly beat and a few tears gathered ready to fall.

"Fly away! fly away! good-bye!" he muttered hoarsely as he snapped his fingers. In a moment the doves were off. He stood watching them wing their flight through the morning air, until they seemed but a few small specks in the distant ether-space. Then he turned mechanically toward the house, and his poor heart felt the first pangs of the suffering that parting always brings with it.

An hour later he and his mother were comfortably seated in a Pullman car bound

for Billington—the college city. Tender farewells had been spoken, and now, that they were all over for a time, both breathed more easily. It was a tedious journey. The day was very hot, but towards evening the air grew cooler. At six o'clock Mrs. Mathers gave a sigh of relief and the conductor brought the welcome news that in about ten minutes the train would arrive at Billington.

"I wonder if Mrs. Atherton will be at the depot to meet us, Charles," she said. "I sent her a telegram early this morning and surely she must have received it. However, I know Billington fairly well and Grosvenor street will be found easily. You have often heard me speak of Mrs. Atherton, Charles. She is the dearest friend I have in all the world. I hardly know what I would do without her. She has shown me much kindness, especially during the last six years. Forty years ago we were neighbor's children in Stanford, and when we grew older we went off together to the convent. At graduation we were fast friends and all the succeeding years that passed since have only helped to cement those sacred bonds. Mrs. Atherton was the first to marry. Colonel Atherton, her husband, had inherited a large fortune in early life from his grandfather and was considered very wealthy.

But he was not strong, and two years after marriage he died in the Bermudas, whither he had journeyed to recuperate after a severe illness. Mrs. Atherton was, therefore, left a very rich widow early in life. But see, Charles! here we're in Billington at last. Do you see those fine buildings yonder! I think they are part of St. Jerome's."

They were now nearing the depot, and mother and son were both looking out of the windows. The engine and cars were moving along slowly and the platform was literally packed with men, women, and children.

"Ah! there she is, the dear soul," burst out Mrs. Mathers, excitedly. "I just caught a glimpse of her, Charles." And together they elbowed their way out of the crowded car into the fresh air.

Two hours later the two old friends were sitting on the balcony of the Atherton residence. Charles had swung himself into a hammock and was soon fast asleep.

Mrs. Mathers and Mrs. Atherton were about of the same age, but in looks one was the decided opposite of the other. The former was tall, sharp-featured, and delicate looking as a flower. The latter was short, plump, rosy-cheeked and her voice strong, almost masculine. The two chatted briskly,

and laugh followed laugh as they recalled old faces in the brilliant kaleidoscope of the Past. At times their voices drifted into a deep tender tone of pathos, lips would tremble and eyes grow moist, as the songs of bygone days came ringing through the vistas of olden years; and the next minute would bring forth so much brightness, their voices would break into such loud peals of laughter, that even the busy passing newsboys and street urchins turned their heads and wondered.

It was band evening. Billington had already begun to turn out "en masse", for its people was a music loving people and prided itself upon the excellence of its strong musical organization. Herr Von Schiller, a brilliant son of Leipzig, swayed the baton, and everybody loved him for it. His promenade concerts were a fixture with the good people of Billington, and the jolly German professor was always sure of a smile and a kind word from every one in the city.

The streets below were now black with people; the noisy humdrum of their gladdened voices, and the constant tramp of feet on the asphalt pavements were to be heard above the song of the busy river that flowed but half a block away. The lights in the bandstand across the way suddenly

"The Years between."

2



lit up, and one by one the musicians entered. Last, but not least, came the gray-haired Von Schiller, in his hand the trusty baton.

The murmuring of voices in the streets around suddenly ceased. All eyes were on the gentle professor as he mounted to his place. A white-gloved hand was raised into the air; there was a sudden downward sweep of the steady arm, and a volume of delightful sound floated into the cool air. Then followed the ringing, soothing air of a rapturous Strauss waltz which made one dream of Hungarian life. One could almost feel the breath of the blue Danube and hear the roar of its many-tongued waves. When the number was finished, rounds of applause followed from the delighted spectators. Von Schiller's face was quite red and a bright smile brought out many wrinkles on it.

Out upon the air again floated liquid notes. The selection this time was a "Romance Sans Paroles" and the delicate little song sought out every longing, every pain. It was a beautiful legato movement, which recalled in the hearts of the audience burning memories. The two women on the Atherton balcony listened eagerly.

"What's the name of that selection, Minnie?" at last broke forth Mrs. Atherton.

"The music is very familiar. I have often played it myself and yet I cannot recall the name."

"Played it yourself, Mae? Well, I should think you have," quickly interrupted Mrs. Mathers, in faint, trembling voice. "Why, years ago you used to play it for me often at the convent. Do you remember now?"

"Let me see! Ah, yes! Why, to be sure. It is Francis Thome's dear little heart-song—Simple Aveu."

Again the two listened attentively.

When it was over Mrs. Mathers' eyes were moist with tears and her face bore a troubled look. The music had touched her deeply; she tried to speak but the words would not come. Just then Mrs. Atherton turned slightly—her eyes still fastened on that throbbing sea of humanity down in the streets. Cheer followed cheer, and then there was a mighty clapping of hands.

"See, Minnie! Von Schiller is going to favor us with an encore, the good fellow! He is always so generous."

Then her eyes fell upon Mrs. Mathers and she grew sympathetic and much concerned. "Ah! you're crying! Why, what is the matter?" she asked. "Do tell me, Minnie! Unburden the heavy load that seems to be crushing you!"

“Oh, 'tis nothing much, Mae. Music often gets the better of my feelings.” Even then her voice trembled.

“But there is something more. I know it—I feel it. You must tell me!”

“Why should I tell you, Mae? You have had troubles enough of your own without being burdened with mine. And, after all, I was only thinking. Music always sets me thinking.”

“Why are we friends, Minnie? Is it not that we may give sympathy when needed most? Is it not that we may dry the tears of sorrow that wear deep lines on pallid cheeks? God desires them to blossom as the rose, and, when their color is waning, 'tis then a friend's sympathetic hand should always be willing to retouch the faded blooms, kindly and lovingly. Again then, I crave an answer.”

Mrs. Mathers moved about nervously. The moonlight shone full upon her white face and revealed pearly tears that were ready to fall. At last, she began. Her speech came interruptedly:—

“It seemed so foolish, and yet I could not help it. The music impressed me deeply. Heavy thoughts came upon me and, in a moment of weakness, overpowered me. — These thoughts often come to me during the

day. I try to fight them, but I am not strong enough. A few minutes ago, while my eyes rested upon my sleeping boy in yonder hammock, they came again—burning thoughts—and they melted my heart into tears. I thought of him, my boy, and wondered—wondered if my money would last until his education was completed and he would come back to me a priest. I am not rich, and I have often thought the undertaking too great for me, but, Mae, I would sacrifice everything to feel that my boy was making the most of life. Now, these are the thoughts that sway my feelings continually, and to-night, as the dancing moonbeams traced a smile on his innocent young face, they came upon me, heavier and more resistless than ever, and I felt like snatching him in my arms and flying back to Stanford, rather than that the future should hold for me a bitter disappointment.”

Again the streets resounded with loud cheers and the riotous clapping of hands. The two women were too absorbed to notice what was going on below. Mrs. Atherton was trying to decide how now she might best act the Good Samaritan to her old friend.

“Banish those thoughts forever, Minnie!” began Mrs. Atherton. “Twenty years have

passed, and yet I have not forgotten the promise I made you that bright June day we parted at the convent. The morning was strongly odorous with rose perfume, the happy commencement chorus was still upon the air, and in our ears the words of the valedictorian still lingered. Now I see it all. There we stood beneath the willows, near the old convent gate, arm in arm with dear Sister Camille—God bless her!—from whom we were so loath to part. Do you remember how we swore to be true to the old love, and how I asked you to come to my arms at any time in the future, when in trouble or need, and I would help you? Even now I see upon your bosom the silver crucifix which I gave you to remind you of that sacred trust. Now God gives me the opportunity of doing something for you, Minnie, and I intend to make the most of it. You shall not pay one cent for the education of that child, and, when I go to St. Jerome's with you tomorrow, I will pay Father Salvini the first year's tuition. I do so willingly and gladly for your sake, Minnie, and for the sake of your child. The more I look at him, the more I think of my own boy. But then, I must not murmur. I had no right to keep him with me when the Master's voice called him away!"

In the meantime the color had returned to Mrs. Mathers' cheeks and the tears flowed freely.

"You are so good, Mae, and I thank you," she said gratefully, "but I would rather you would let me pay for Charles' education so long as I am in a position to do so, and some day—some day, when I am in want, God knows, I will come to you and remind you of the promise."

Later there was a stir in the hammock, and out jumped Charles, sleepily, and came to where they were sitting. Then he yawned and stretched himself and rubbed his eyes. The band concert was over. Charles was sorry that he had missed it all, and for some time he stood gazing from the balcony into the street, until the footfalls of the last straggler died away on a distant, lonely pavement.



### Chapter III—The Stone is Lifted.

Charles was up with the birds the next morning. He felt refreshed after a good night's rest. The sun was just peeping over the hills and the dew rose heavenward like a young child's pure prayer. He could not resist the temptation of everything out of door. He was impressed with the lordliness of it all. Nature had never shown him so much grandeur before. The birds fairly sang out their little souls in music, and the vagrant gypsy-breezes caught some of the melodies and imprisoned them in their green tents in the tree-tops.

Gradually the city streets became noisier, and soon at every corner people were passing on their various errands. Charles, however, thought he was all alone—all alone with the beautiful morning—as he wandered along the well-kept garden walk. Flowers there were in abundance, and they made his heart glad. Presently he came upon a bed where roses had lived in the warm summer. The little green leaves were turning brown and he could see nothing but empty stems. At last his eyes came upon a solitary rose. Its white leaves were already turning, and

no wonder! It was dying of loneliness. — Eagerly he plucked it, and, when he gazed into its white soul, he noticed that a poor, dead bee lay confined there, so still and cold. The rose had given up her gorgeous leaves and woven for that poor inanimate thing a lovely shroud. The anxious little lover would never again fly to her outstretched arms and taste the honey on her scented lips. And the rose felt sad and in her eyes the dewy tears shone like diamonds. Truly, the price of Love is Pain—and, as Charles walked out of the garden into the busy street, young as he was, a little lesson came into his heart—and he thought of his mother.

The streets were now filling up with people. Shop girls, laborers with dinner pails, men, women and children, were on their way to begin their work for the daily crust of bread. Whistles, bells, noises of all descriptions smote the air. Now and then crowded cars passed by, weighted down with the humanity that must fight to win. It was a busy time—these minutes of preparation in the early morning hour for the day's work. Charles was deeply impressed with it all; it was so unlike quiet Stanford, and his heart strings caught a few notes of the song of Toil, and for the moment this



great restlessness, this wild uncertainty written upon every face held him spell-bound.

When he reached home his mother met him. She had been in his room several times and, not finding him, had been necessarily alarmed.

"Where have you been, child?" she asked, somewhat nervously.

"Just up the street," he answered, boyishly. "I woke quite early. The birds would not let me sleep longer, so I dressed and went out for a walk. But say, mother—the coffee smells fine. I'm awfully hungry."

Just then Mrs. Atherton brushed in pleasantly, and with her there came a goodly amount of sunshine. In an instant Charles' red cheeks were between her warm hands. I dare say they never got such a rubbing before.

"What a fine sprig of a boy he is, Minnie," she exclaimed. "My! won't he make the people stand around Sundays when they are late for Mass. I am sure he will have no squealing babies in church, or squeaking voices in the choir either, for that matter, when he'll be Father Mathers. Ha! Ha!—" and she laughed heartily as the bell in the hall announced that breakfast was ready.

An hour later the three stood at the portal of St. Jerome's. Charles' eyes opened widely. He was anxious to see this little world which his mother had pictured to him so often. In a minute the door opened, and a cheerful little priest ushered them into the president's office.

"Father Salvini will be in presently," he said, as he bowed himself out of the room. Charles was very nervous, and his eyes sought out every corner of the room. It was nicely furnished, plain but artistic. Upon the walls hung a number of choice Italian scenes in oil, and, on the desk in the corner, stood a large marble bust of Shakespeare.

"Mother!" at last broke forth Charles, "is not Father Salvini a fine-looking man? He doesn't seem a bit cross."

"Child, where is he? Do you see his picture anywhere?"

"Why, to be sure, mother. Don't you see him? He is there on the desk—the marble bust I mean. I can see his name on the pedestal from here."

The two women exchanged glances and laughed heartily.

"What are you laughing at, mother?" the boy asked in an injured tone of voice.

"At you, Charles. No—no—that is not

Father Salvini, but Shakespeare, the great English dramatist."

"But, mother, his name is there as plain as day."

The child would not be beaten.

Mrs. Mathers walked over to the bust and read the inscription. "See! Charles," she exclaimed, "it reads:—

To Father Salvini

From his classmates."

"Well, if it isn't him, I'm sure it looks enough like him to fool anybody," the boy declared, stubbornly.

Again a laugh sounded through the room, and Charles did not like the ring of it.

"Look at the face closely, now, Charles," spoke Mrs. Atherton. "Perhaps you will change your mind."

"No, I'm sure those eyes are just like Father Salvini's," he said.

Just then footsteps sounded in the hall. There was a slight cough and the rattling of beads, and in walked Father Salvini in his neat, black cassock, with a smile that was pleasing. He greeted the three warmly. He was an old friend of the Atherton's, and Mrs. Atherton always felt at home in his company.

Father Salvini was a man of thirty, dark, tall, and handsome. He had the face we

always associate with a Cardinal, clear-cut, distinguished, and his outward bearing was that of a ruler—a king amongst men. Born and educated in Italy, his English had that delightful accent so musical to one's ears. He was very talkative and recalled his early college days. Then he spoke of his young life out amongst the Italian hills, as he toyed carelessly with the little silver snuff-box in his lap. He was in his element, and his audience was delighted. He was the son of a duke. His father's castle stood on one of the historic hills just outside of Rome—the grand city of the Caesars.

"So you have come to stay with us Charles," he spoke kindly. "Well! well! Classes open today, and I will have the master of studies see you and arrange your work for tomorrow. I am sure you will work hard and be a credit to your mother."

Father Salvini turned in his chair and faced the desk. For a few minutes he was busy registering the new student. Then he rose and said: "But come and I will show you the grounds. They are particularly beautiful at this time of the year. I will introduce Charles to some of the boys."

"Just a minute, Father" interrupted Mrs. Mathers. "I would like to pay this year's tuition now."

Father Salvini again turned his back to the women and sat down at his desk. Just then Mrs. Atherton tried to press a roll of bills into her friend's hand. Mrs. Mathers, however, motioned the willing hand away and whispered under her breath: "Not yet! Mae, I beg of you—not yet!" And from her own purse she paid the first year's tuition for her son.

Charles was soon out amongst the boys. It was the half hour recess and the college campus was fairly alive with excitement.

Father Salvini showed the two women the college park. It was a beautiful spot, with its well-kept flower-beds, massive trees, and the singing river running through it.

Away in the distance a mountain raised its glorious head to the clouds. Presently they entered the woods, which the students were so loath to leave whenever the college gong sounded the call to work. The sunbeams danced gayly through the heavy branches overhead, and the sound of the merry student voices, stealing from the college campus, disturbed the brooding peace around.

On their return Father Salvini again turned to take a last look at the scene so dear to his heart. He loved the forest and

all its associations. It was such a quiet place, such a cloister for meditation and prayer, and many a silent hour he had spent there in sweet converse with his God. He was a poet as well, and nature always appeals to the singer of songs. The woods were full of oak trees, and on their way home he told them how old some of the trees could possibly be.

"You know, somehow or other," he continued, "whenever I look at those gnarled oaks, tall and majestic, they remind me of the giant intellects that tower above the world's mediocre crowd. Their feet are on the ground, but their heads—ah! they are sun-kissed and star-crowned."

"Ah! that my boy would only become as an oak amongst the trees!" exclaimed Mrs. Mathers. "Father Salvini, I leave him to you. Do with him what you can. He is all I have in this life."

"I will do all I can for him, Mrs. Mathers," the priest answered, gently. "I will try to make a man of him. The world is badly in need of men—men, who have the strength of justice in their hands and the gold of virtue in their hearts; men, whom the lusts of office have not ruined, whose warning voices sound clear and distinct above the tumult and misery in the street.

We want strong men, good men, pure men—men of conviction, with bones in their bodies. Charles is yet a mere boy, but he will develop with the years. Let me hope that the young sapling may thrive and grow into a stalwart oak, and provide shelter and comfort for you, Mrs. Mathers, in your old age!”

Father Salvini spoke entertainingly on the way. His mind was filled with the wisdom of the sages and the poets.

The college campus was still lively with tumultuous boyhood, when the three returned from their walk. Charles, who had been playing ball with a group of boys, espied his mother and ran up to meet her. He could hardly contain himself; he was so delighted with his new surroundings.

“Oh, mother,” he cried out joyfully, “I love this place. The boys are so nice and I know I won’t be a bit lonely here. I just met a boy who knows poor Thady, the cripple, at home. Won’t Thady be pleased when I write him? Then I met another boy whose father served Mass for poor Father Flynn years ago, among the hills of Donegal, and he told me a lot of the fairy stories of old Ireland. Be sure to tell Father Flynn when you go back to Stanford, mother.”

Mother and son kissed each other goodbye

at the old college gate. Tears were shed, but they were such tears as come with every parting. Father Salvini and the boy entered the college together. That evening in the chapel the priest offered up a special prayer for the widow's son. "Father of heaven!" he prayed, "take into Thy protection and care this fatherless child!"

When the two women reached home Mrs. Mathers was in good spirits. "Mae", she said, "I will never shed a tear over that boy again! Father Salvini is a good man, and for some time in the future my boy will be in the hands of a saint. I will worry no more. I feel like a new woman. My heart is easy now. The heavy stone is lifted."





#### **Chapter IV.—Light on the Horizon.**

From the day on which Charles entered St. Jerome's to the end of his college career, Father Salvini took a deep interest in his welfare. To be sure, there were many boys to keep the watchful eyes of a president busy, but somehow or other he always had a feeling of pity in his heart for the widow's son. For eight years the two had been together, and eight happy years they had been for Charles. The kind priest had verily been a father to him. Whenever anything haunted the heart of the boy he sought Father Salvini, and in his wise counsels always found peace.

The last school term of Charles' college career was drawing to a close. The boy had developed into a fine young man, and more than ever before he was the delight of that motherly heart at Stanford. Until now, Mrs. Mathers had not been obliged to call upon the charity of her friend. She had seen her son through college safely, and now her thoughts were wrapped up in the forthcoming commencement exercises. The classical and philosophical courses would then be over. Another three or four years at

the seminary, and then—then all would be ended—this ceaseless striving and waiting. Her boy would be a priest, and her cup of happiness would be filled to overflowing.

In the mind of the student, however, other thoughts were stirring, but he threw a cloak over them and few suspected that so cheerful a face could cover so troubled a heart. But one did suspect. It was his friend, Father Salvini.

One morning the two met in the park. Father Salvini had noticed a great change in the boy for some months past, and this chance meeting afforded him an opportunity for questioning him.

“Charles, my boy,” he said, sympathetically, “I have always thought kindly of you. You have worked faithfully, and I can safely say that you will carry off quite a number of the medals this year. Your teachers are proud of you. They see for you a bright career. In a short time commencement will be here and then you will leave us. I would like to see you happy and hopeful, my boy. Instead, you appear to be worried. The last few months have shown me that something is weighing you down. — Charles, you have always trusted me. Trust me again! Tell me just what is the matter and I know you will feel better.”

The priest's searching glance was full upon the student. Charles' eyes were upon the ground. A warm flush crept into his troubled face. Yes, he would tell it now.—tell all, and then he would feel relieved. He made an effort, but the words fairly paralyzed his tongue. Then his eyes sought the open, honest countenance of the big-hearted man before him; they had a pitiful look in them, but again the words failed him.

For a few moments both walked on in silence— a silence that seemed to Charles to have suddenly lengthened into a year. At last the words came to him. His voice trembled with emotion.

"Father," he began, "I know I should tell you, but I cannot just now. My feelings will not let me. I will not be long—just a little while—and then I will tell you all—yes, everything."

The priest laid his arm upon the boy's shoulder and together they walked back to the college. Neither spoke, but in the mind of Father Salvini a fresh new thought had taken life.

For hours afterward Charles did not forget Father Salvini's words. The afternoon passed quietly, but the boy was restless. Then evening came—a clear blue sky overhead, hundreds of flowers sending their per-

fumes through the air and birds singing out their very hearts in gladness. Glorious was the music that rushed impetuously through the glad green woods. Even the little river, that wound in and out of the college park, caught up the melodies and gurgled on joyfully. It was the last evening in May, and its closing hours stole very near to the hearts of the boys of St. Jerome's, for they marked the ending of a short but sweet holiday.

Already the crimson shadows were creeping over the city, but the campus was still a-thrill with life and excitement. In his troubled state of mind Charles wandered through the park, along the river bank. Everything around him was bright, but his heart was heavy. Sinking down on a bench he caught his head in his hands and stared for a long time into the busy waters at his feet.

The old chapel bell sent a sweet clear peal through the air. A few minutes later the campus was deserted and the boys entered the chapel for the closing of the May devotions. The sound of the bell had interrupted Charles in his thoughts; he rose and retraced his steps to the chapel—a chaste little building, nestling in the shade of the maples.

When Charles reached the chapel door the song was ended. He bowed his head reverently and attempted to enter, but something pulled him back. Father Salvini was to deliver a discourse on "Vocation". Charles felt he could not sit it out with a heart so restless as his then was. Again the organ played softly, and then Father Salvini's strong voice in prayer stole through the open door. To Charles' ears it was the voice of a friend speaking, and, as he gazed through the open door at the inspiring picture before him—the altar ablaze with lights, the kneeling worshippers—and listened to the prayers, his feelings overpowered him. He slipped into the cozy chapel quietly and stole over unnoticed into a dark corner where human eye could not discover him.

Out upon the air stole the soft notes of the organ, now rising and falling in thrilling accompaniment to a sweet, boyish tenor voice. Charles halted for an instant and listened eagerly. Toni Longo, a rescued, little street Arab, whom one of the Fathers had found in a city concert hall several weeks previous, was in the choir-loft. His voice sounded like that of an angel, singing through the open windows of heaven.

Presently Father Salvini rose, and, turn-

ing, faced the boys and began his little heart-sermon. It was always customary with him to give the students a quiet talk on vocation once a year shortly before the close of the school term. The most interested listener in his audience on this particular evening was Charles Mathers.

The time was near at hand in which he was to give his decision as to what path in life he was going to follow. Now he stood at the very cross-roads. No wonder that his young, untried heart quivered with fear. The future lay before him, bright it is true, but the distant fields were undiscovered and lay afar off, shrouded in purple mist.

When the discourse was over the boys filed out reverently. Then followed Father Salvini wrapped in deep thought. Charles had passed unnoticed. A few minutes later all was quiet in the little chapel. Presently the trusty old sexton ascended the altar-steps to extinguish the burning candles. The next moment he took a severe coughing spell—he was subject to these often—and it almost prostrated him. Charles ran forward from his hiding place and caught the old man in his strong arm, just as he was about to fall down before the altar.

“I am all right now, Charles, thank you!” he said feebly, ten minutes later. “You need

not accompany me. I can walk. I shall find my room without assistance, thank you! But please put out the other lights, won't you like a good boy?"

Thereupon the humble, hump-backed sexton stumbled out of the house of prayer.

When all was dark again Charles wandered over to the Sorrowful Mother on the side altar, fragrant with rich lily and rose-perfume. Unconsciously almost he sank upon his knees and pleadingly extended his arms to the Mother of all the living for help and counsel in his dark hour. All the evening his eyes had rested upon the gentle Mother. Did not the smile on her saintly face remind him of his own mother, back there in Stanford? Did he not cling tenderly to that anxious mother-heart at home?

Presently loud sobs filled the quiet chapel. Charles Mathers was shedding bitter tears — the first in all the eight long years at St. Jerome's.

Ten minutes later there was a gentle rap at the president's door. Father Salvini turned good-naturedly from his desk and cried out carelessly:

"Come in!"

The door opened slowly, and there stood Charles. On his way to his room from the chapel he had not had the heart to pass his

friend's door—little dreaming what the next half hour might bring forth.

“Sit down, Charles, my boy, and do not waste your strength standing! I thought you would be in bed by this time. It is ten by the clock, and the verger has already been on his rounds. He reported only a few minutes ago that you had not yet put in an appearance. Where have you been? Charles, you are sick! Your eyes look red and—” A look of surprise stole into the priest's face.

“No, Father. There is nothing the matter with me except I am heartsick. I just came from the chapel a few moments ago.”

“Some little affair of conscience again. I presume?” the good priest questioned with a smile.

“Not altogether Father. But I must come to my story. My college year is nigh at an end, and I must decide what future course I will take in life. I am afraid poor mother will be disappointed,” he continued, displaying deep emotion. “For years she has looked forward to my coming home to her as one of God's anointed. It has been her highest ambition in life to see me a priest some day, but, Father, I must tell you—O! I cannot. The thought of it nearly drives me mad and I am afraid it will kill poor



mother. Father!—Father—I—cannot—become—a—priest. I feel that it is not my vocation. I have prayed, I have done everything, and yet that strange something within me whispers: ‘Child! that is not thy vocation. There is other work for thee to do!’ For months and months this has been ringing in my ears. I tried to fight the thoughts that rose up within me, but louder and stronger grew the strange voice within. I often felt like telling mother, but I could not summon up courage to do so. Poor mother!’

Charles could go no farther. His feelings overpowered him.

Father Salvini looked pityingly into the young man’s face.

“Do not worry, my boy!” he said sympathetically. “The present trial seems crushing to you, but God will give your mother and yourself the necessary strength. If you think and feel that you should not become a priest, then give up the idea at once and be happy. Better this than to enter the priesthood for your mother’s sake and be miserable all your days. Your mother will be disappointed, of course, but God will give her the necessary grace to overcome the bitterness of it all.”

“Yes, she will be disappointed, but then I

intend to return to Stanford to live with her and make her comfortable for the remainder of her days. I am strong, and I feel these arms of mine should help to earn the means to keep her in comfort."

"Do not think of such a plan at present, Charles," Father Salvini interrupted quickly. "It would be the bitterest disappointment for her to know that you had given up your studies. Charles, my boy, your mother told me long ago that she would like to see you among men, as an oak among the trees. Do not go back to her a weakling."

"But Father," said Charles, sorrowfully, "my ambitions soar higher than you think, but I dare not entertain such thoughts. In the end I should find them impossible anyway."

"What would be impossible?" asked the priest kindly.

"I would like to become a doctor," exclaimed Charles. "Medicine holds for me many attractions, and I would be happy to espouse her cause, now that I feel I am not worthy to labor in the Lord's vineyard, as mediator between God and man. But I dare not think of it. The university course would entail a great expense and I have no funds. Perhaps mother is in straitened circumstances now. Father, I feel I should work—"

"Never mind, Charles," the priest interrupted. "Do not worry! When the time comes all the little difficulties will be scraightened out. The world is badly in need of men—honest, conscientious souls—and I rejoice with you to know that you are thinking of taking your place out there—somewhere—in the lonely by-ways of life to soothe the cries of agony in the valleys of Pain."

To leave the boy to his own thoughts for a few minutes, Father Salvini rose and approached the window and looked out into the empty grounds. The passing moon threw pleasant shadows over the grass, and in the distance the little river sparkled like a sheet of molten glass. When he turned and faced Charles again, he noticed that his eyes had a different look in them.

"By the way, Charles," he began, "it just occurred to me that perhaps a friend might become interested in your future and help you along over the rocky road."

"But where might such a one be found?"

"Right in this city, but a few blocks away, we have a woman of means who devotes much money annually to works of charity. She is wealthy and very generous."

"Who is she?" asked Charles, excitedly.

"A Mrs. Atherton," was the reply. "We are good friends, and I see her frequently. By the way, she's the great friend of your mother. To be sure, you know her, Charles. You go there quite often."

"Mrs. Atherton? Ah, yes. We are well acquainted, and yet she was farthest away in my mind when you spoke, Father."

"What do you say about going to see her tomorrow, Charles?" asked the priest. "If necessary, I will bring all my influence to bear upon the matter."

"Oh, I would so like to call and see her!" said the young man, in those precious moments of newly found happiness.

"You may go then!"

"Thank you, Father. You have made me feel very happy," Charles added gratefully as he rose to leave the room. Over his darkened horizon a new light had dawned at last.



## Chapter V.—The Benefactress.

“Strange! I was just thinking of you a few moments ago, and here you are as big as life. How happy you look! Oh, I am so glad you came to see me,” the pleasant little woman replied smilingly as she placed her work-basket upon the table near by.

Mrs. Atherton was deeply interested in settlement work, and many an hour she plied with her needle to provide clothing for the uncared for children in the swarming alleys. Her heart was with the poor, and her kindness and riches did much to let in a burst of light upon many a bitter, gloomy Calvary.

The afternoon sun stole merrily into the neat and well-kept drawing room and threw pleasant shadows upon the carpeted floor. Mrs. Atherton had spent a busy morning in the down-town streets. In rain or shine, at a certain hour every morning, she could be seen making a house to house visit in the neglected part of the city, relieving suffering on all sides by word and deed.

“You are a real Sister of Charity, Mrs. Atherton,” Charles exclaimed, when the woman had finished telling him some of her

daily experiences among the poor, "and I am sure you find much gratification in your work. After all, our short stay in this NOW should be a preparation for that eternal THEN which awaits us—somewhere at the parting of the ways. You are making other lives happier by your contact with them. The world, too, is brighter for the sound of your voice and the warmth of your smile. In short, you are making the most of life."

"I do not know what I would do without those little waifs I meet daily on my visits—the little begrimed angels. Born and raised in an atmosphere of crime and degradation, the poor little things hardly know what kindness means. Only to-day I entered a hovel, the like of which I hope I may never see again. In a dark, damp cellar, in one of the tenement houses, I came upon this touching little drama. As I entered the hovel, in the light of a tallow candle, I heard the rats scurrying over the wet earth. The heavy breathing of a living person was all that broke the silence around. Upon a bundle of rags, in one corner, lay a little girl, probably two or three years old, fast asleep. Near by, on a couple of boards that served as a bed, lay a young woman with a new-born babe in her arms. I thought

of the stable at Bethlehem, but it was heaven compared to this place. The only bit of furniture in the room was an old table and broken chair. I drew near to the sick mother and she greeted me with a warm smile. 'I am so glad you came,' she whispered faintly. The child lay sleeping in its mother's arm—poor, frail lily amid life's rosemary and rue. An old soiled towel was all that covered the little form."

"Was there no one around in that dingy place to nurse the woman?" Charles asked, sympathetically.

"No one but the other child, and she, poor thing, looked white as death. Think of a woman being left alone in the supreme hour of motherhood in that hovel of darkness and rats!"

"It is pitiful! pitiful!" cried out Charles with emotion.

"The sick woman told me she had been alone for two whole days, and, during all that time, she and her child had not tasted food."

"But where was her husband?"

"Down town spending all his money on drink. 'He knew I was sick,' she told me, 'and when the baby was born he seemed displeased and left. I have not seen him since'."

"The brute! He deserves to be horse-whipped," Charles interrupted hotly.

"I tidied up the dingy place as well as I could, went out and brought some eatables. and in a few minutes a brisk fire glowed and a feeling of warmth stole through the damp hovel. I made the little mother a good cup of strong tea and she seemed pleased. The tears of gratitude flowed freely from her eyes, and, when I parted from her, she fairly burst out into convulsive sobs. On the stairway I met the drunken husband. His glassy eyes had a strange look in them. He brushed me aside angrily and stumbled down the steps. When he entered the place, the baby woke from its sleep and cried pitifully. 'Stop your yelling, you little, impudent brat!' he hissed vehemently, as his knees weakened and he fell to the ground. 'There'll be no sleep for me tonight, I guess,' he muttered angrily. Then a volley of curses came from his lips. In a few minutes I heard his heavy breathing in sleep. I returned again this afternoon and he still lay there on the ground, but the poor woman in bed was happy in her new blankets and snowy-white pillows. I promised her a dress for the little babe, and here it is, Charles. I put the finishing touches on it just before you came."

"The Years between."

4



And Mrs. Atherton rose and proudly lifted from her work-basket the dainty, little garment.

“It is beautiful,” exclaimed Charles. “You will get your reward for all of this, Mrs. Atherton. May you long be spared in the noble work!”

“There are hundreds of women in this city, Charles, who could help the good work along. They spend millions on diamonds; waste whole fortunes on dinners, banquets and other social functions; build home for their pet dogs, wait upon them, nurse them, care for them and dress them as zealously and carefully as a mother would her child. And, yet, these so-called leaders of women never think of the thousands who are starving in the hovels for the want of milk and bread. Two real pictures I see every day, full of strange contrast, the personality of the Divine Galilean visible only in the one where Poverty toils on and sheds bitter tears. But why speak of these things, Charles? I am afraid I am growing just a wee bit morbid. I hope I have not depressed you?”

Anything touching humanity was dear to the boy's heart, and he drank in all the little lessons that came to him as a result of Mrs. Atherton's words.

"Depressed me, Mrs. Atherton? Why, no! Instead, you fill my heart with fresh courage and nerve me stronger for life's battle."

"Let me see, Charles, your school term is nearly over. Is it not?"

"Yes. Only three more weeks and commencement will be here."

"You must be a happy boy."

"Happy and not happy," thoughtfully answered Charles.

"What's the matter, Charles?" asked Mrs. Atherton, surprised.

"I am happy to know that the course will soon be over. It is a pleasure to think of it, but I am afraid it will hold for mother such bitter disappointments."

"Disappointments? Child! what do you mean?"

Charles moved about nervously and his sentences came with great effort. "Mrs. Atherton—I—cannot—do not—want to—become a priest."

The woman eyed the boy intently and for some moments neither spoke. In trembling voice the boy continued: "No! I cannot become a priest. It is not my vocation. For the past few years I have felt it, but I dared not tell a soul. Only last night, in the bitter stress of worry, I uncovered my heart to Father Salvini and told him all."

“And what did he say?”

“He gave me every encouragement, and told me not to worry—that I was the master of my own vocation. If I felt that I did not want to become a priest I was to give up the thought forever.”

“To be sure, Charles. Do not worry about it. It would be foolish to do so and, besides, we need strong men in the world.”

“Yes, but what will mother think of it all? It will break her heart. You know she always wanted me to—.” The poor boy could not go farther.

A sigh escaped Mrs. Atherton's lips. She also realized how his mother would feel. She had set her heart upon his becoming a priest, but then she surely did not want to see her boy unhappy in a vocation which, if once accepted, he could never forsake.

“Dry your tears, Charles! I will write your mother and tell her all and everything will be all right.”

“It is very kind of you, Mrs. Atherton, but then I think you might save yourself all this trouble for, when I return home again, I expect it will be to stay there. My arms are strong, and I feel that I ought to work and support mother. She is not well. In her last letter she wrote that she had several fainting spells. I think it my

duty to go—but it will be hard to forsake my books for the spade or the office desk.”

“Surely you do not intend doing so. You have a bright future ahead and it would be folly to turn back now.”

“Yes, but what am I to do? The path I see before me leads to the university, but I dare not think of it. It is impossible.”

“Nothing is impossible, Charles. There is no such word for those who have courage and pluck.”

“Ah, you do not understand,” he interrupted nervously. “Personally I would be willing to do anything to accomplish my ends, but I am afraid my ambitions are so high that I can never reach them.”

“What course would you like to follow?”

“Mrs. Atherton, I would like to become a doctor. This suffering humanity about me is calling—calling incessantly for help. I like the sound of her strong, clear voice. I know I shall never be happy in any other calling. But I should not entertain so false a hope.”

“Why, Charles?” interrupted the interested woman. “What difficulties seem to be standing in your way?”

“Only one, but it is a great, a mighty one.”

“Then name it, child!”

The climax was now reached. Like a lawyer Charles had led his questioner to the crucial moment in which his future fate was to be decided.

"Mrs. Atherton, to be plain with you," he answered, "the great difficulty in my way is the important question of funds. Mother, you know, cannot afford the expense of a medical course. I am penniless. God gave me brains but no gold."

Instantly Mrs. Atherton's promise to the boy's mother, years ago, flashed across her mind.

"If that is all, Charles, then calm your thoughts at once! You shall never suffer so long as I have a dollar left. Therefore, throw all your worry aside! I mean to pay for your education from now on. Only be a good boy, and I will do all I can for you. You shall go to the university when it opens in the fall, and money shall be the last thing to stand in the way of you and your cherished ambitions."

"Thanks, Mrs. Atherton! This is all so very good of you, and I fear I shall never be able to repay you. At some time in the future, however, when fortune smiles upon me, I shall return to you every cent that you have so generously advanced for my education."

“Then you mean to borrow this money from me?”

“Yes, until such a time as I am able to pay it back.”

“But, Charles, that is not at all necessary. I am quite willing to give you all this as a present. Your mother and I are bosom friends, and for her sake I would do anything.”

“I shall not be able to accept a cent from you, Mrs. Atherton, upon such conditions. It hurts my manliness, and I would be very unhappy. I appreciate the goodness which inspires the kindly act on your part, but, Mrs. Atherton, I beg of you to lend me the money. This is all I ask, and I hope it will not be long before I can pay the debt.”

“Very well then, Charles. Let it be as you wish. Pay me back at any time—in ten, fifteen years from now—but, remember, consider your own wants first.”

“A thousand thanks, Mrs. Atherton!”

Charles seemed puzzled for a minute, his brow wrinkled, and he continued: “But what will mother say to all this? She would so like to see me a priest.”

“Leave that to me. I will write her a long letter to-night, and tell her all. I know she

will be satisfied. Why, gracious! in two weeks she will be with us here in Billington at your graduation, and then we will celebrate in honor of the prospective doctor."



## Chapter VI.—In the Cure's Rose-Garden.

On his way back to St. Jerome's, Charles could not help feeling elated. Mrs. Atherton had come to his rescue at a most opportune time, and his heart fairly leaped with joy. The obstacle that lay in the path of his ambition was now removed, and the future lay before him a promising land, no longer shrouded in purple mist, but clear and bright and sunshiny. In the heart of the boy, however, there were other strange feelings stirring in this supreme hour. There was a feeling of pain creeping out of all this great joy that he could not subdue. What will his mother say when she hears it all? The disappointment will almost kill her. Charles loved her deeply—but, after all, was he, by gratifying her desires, to add misery and unhappiness to his own life?

The first person to meet Charles that afternoon was Father Salvini.

"Well, my boy, how did you fare?"

"Very well, Father. Just think of it, Mrs. Atherton has promised to see me through the university. I shall be frightfully in debt at the end of my course."

"I knew she would stand by you, Charles,



There are few such genuine hearts as hers in this weary, strenuous, work-a-day world. She is always willing to extend a helping hand. You must be a happy boy now."

"I am. If mother will only be satisfied, then everything will be all right. You know I never told her. I never had the heart to tell her that I did not want to become a priest, and now, when she hears it all, I am afraid it will be too much for her, poor soul! You know, Father, she is not very strong."

"Never mind, Charles. I will write her and tell her all, and, when she comes to your graduation, believe me it will be with feelings of joy and pride."

"Thank you, Father! Mrs. Atherton also said that she would write. Surely the two letters will bring her some comfort."

"Rest assured, they will."

Mrs. Mathers, in far away Stanford, was very busy arranging her house for her son's home-coming. Only two more weeks she counted and he would be with her, and it would all seem like home again. How she had longed for the day to hear his voice about the house again! Even the little birds near the window seemed to be waiting for the sound of his footsteps.

The little study upstairs was neat and tidy, ready to welcome back the busy student

from college halls. The flowers in the window looked fresh in the warm June sun. A mother's tender hand had watered them faithfully these long months.

On this particular morning, two days following Charles' visit to Grosvenor street, Mrs. Mathers rose very early. She had many little things to do. First of all a number of new pictures had to be hung up in Charles' study. One in particular was to occupy a place of honor. Poor Thady, the cripple, trusted friend of Charles' boyhood' days, had developed into quite an artist. One day his father carried him to the river's bank, just a few blocks away. Here, he and Charles had spent many a pleasant hour in the long ago watching the steamers come in, loaded down with the merry, light-hearted tourists. That afternoon Thady busied himself with brush and palette, and, when evening stole quietly around, he had painted the whole scene before his eyes—the blue waters below, spotted here and there with boats and steamers, the lonely mountains full of majesty, and still farther in the distance, in a soft, red twilight glow, the many stately pine trees that skirted the busy little city. It was a beautiful watercolor scene.

"I am going to give this picture to Charles Mathers, mother. When he comes home

for his holidays," he said, "he will find it hanging in his study. It will be a pleasant surprise for him, I know. It will remind him of the days we played together. Ah, then I could use my limbs just as well as any boy. Charles was so good to me, when I had the fever and lost the power of walking, that I can never fully repay him."

Mrs. Mathers hung the picture where the light shone full upon it. She did not seem to notice the rose-tinted skies, the blue waters and the lonely mountains. Ah, no! that mother-gaze rested upon the two innocent children sitting on the river's bank—the Thady and Charles of those white days of childhood. Her eyes had tears in them. That morning something heavy seemed to be laying hold of her heart. She felt depressed, and at times a sinking feeling stole through her and almost pulled her down.

Having finished her work about the house she dressed for Mass and hurried down the busy streets as the chimes beat music through the pleasant, morning air. It was the anniversary of Mr. Mathers' death, and the thoughts of the delicate woman stole back to that quiet evening in the far-off past on which she and Charles and Father Flynn had watched patiently at the bedside of the sick man. Her heart ached within her; she

had borne her cross faithfully, but she had never forgotten the one man she had loved. All during Mass she pictured Charles before God's altar, there in the very spot where Father Flynn was standing, and she could not help thinking of her husband. Oh, if he were only here to help share the happiness that would soon be hers!

Mrs. Mathers remained kneeling sometime after the service was over. When she rose to go the church was deserted, and, brushing away a few hot tears, she hurried nervously down the aisle.

It was a bright, sunny morning. The very winds seemed to pause and listen to the sweet strains of bird-music in the many trees and thickets. A clear, warm sun made golden all of Stanford. The Curé's rosegarden stood very close to the old church. It was one of the brightest spots in Stanford and the special delight of Father Flynn. An old gray-haired man, he loved and guarded it as zealously as a mother did her home. There roses bloomed all the summer long, red and white and yellow, wafting their perfume near and far. Early or late, the old priest could be seen walking the well kept garden path, book or beads in hand. The little children in passing called to him, the men tipped their hats politely, and the women

bowed gently, and the good old Curé had a smile and a kindly word for all. For over half a century he had toiled faithfully among his children and they loved him tenderly. He was a distinguished figure there, amid the hundreds of beautiful roses, in his plain black cassock and bright velvet cap.

When Mrs. Mathers passed the garden she noticed the good priest, breviary in hand, coming down the garden-walk.

“Good morning, Mrs. Mathers!” he called out lustily as he made for the closed gate.

“Good morning, Father!” And the two shook hands.

The priest noticed that Mrs. Mathers had failed considerably in health since he had last spoken to her. There were heavy, black rings about her eyes, and they had a distant, tired look in them. Her face somewhat alarmed him, but he did not want her to read his thoughts just then.

“How are you, Mrs. Mathers?” he asked kindly. “I have not seen you for weeks. Are you well?”

“Yes, pretty well. Some weeks ago I was not myself, but lately my strength seems to be coming back and I am so glad.”

“And how is Charles?”

“Quite well, Father!”

Suddenly her eyes brightened.

"I expect to leave for Billington to-morrow," she said, "to visit my old friend, Mrs. Atherton. You know of course that Charles graduates in a week or so. I am so anxious to see him."

"You must be a happy woman, then, to know that there is so much pleasure in store for you."

Just then a passing breeze caught up some of the rose-perfume and drifted on.

"My! what a delicious rose scent fills the air," exclaimed the woman. "And the flowers! they're exquisite. Your garden, Father, reminds one of a blossoming fairyland."

"Pray, step inside Mrs. Mathers, and I will pluck a little bouquet for you. What's your favorite color, red or white or yellow?"

"Red for love," she thought, and gladly she uttered: "Red, Father, please! I always had a preference for red roses."

While the old priest was busy cutting the stems and arranging the flowers Mrs. Mathers' thoughts wandered to a lonely grave not far off. A sigh escaped her lips as her eyes followed the priest, and she whispered to herself: "How good of him! On my way home, I will visit the Silent City and place the roses upon a lonely grave there, for I know some one in heaven will be looking for me this morning."

The gentle priest was ever liberal with his roses, though they were treasures very dear to his heart. When a call came in the summer that some one was sick and dying Father Flynn would be seen leaving the rectory with a bunch of roses. They brightened many a sick room, many a last hour as well. How his children treasured the lovely blooms from the cherished garden! Each little flower seemed to bring them some special message, for Father Flynn always carried consolation, comfort and good cheer wherever he went, and hearts warmed and brightened immediately.

"Take these roses, Mrs. Mathers, with my good wishes!" the old priest spoke kindly. "The reds are particularly bright this summer."

Just as Mrs. Mathers raised her hand to accept the flowers, she uttered a sickly cry and staggered for a few moments. Had not the priest caught her, she would have fallen.

"I grow faint," she whispered—"water—water—"

A few men in passing saw the staggering form in the garden and in a few moments were at the priest's side. Father Flynn laid the woman on the grass and ran to the fountain nearby for water.

"Telephone for the doctor—the ambulance! quick!" he cried, somewhat agitated. The excitement seemed almost too much for the old man.

In a few minutes the ambulance arrived and the sick woman was hurriedly removed to her home. Father Flynn accompanied her.

The doctor was awaiting them. After a brief examination he shook his head. "Heart-failure, I am afraid," he exclaimed. "There is little hope for the poor woman. She will die." Then Father Flynn administered the sacraments and said the prayers for the dying. The doctor injected a second stimulant into her arm, but the breathing became slower and slower and finally drifted into a short sigh.

The doctor again felt her wrist. "She is dying, Father," was all he said.

Just then there was a rap at the door. Father Flynn opened it quietly. It was the postman with two letters addressed to Mrs. Mathers, bearing the Billington post-mark.

The white soul of the sick woman was now hovering on the brink of eternity. In an instant it passed the foothills of Peace into the great Beyond.





## **Chapter VII.—Dr. Charles Mathers.**

The first weeks that followed Mrs. Mathers' death were bitter ones for Charles. His young heart had always been a stranger to great sorrow. It had never been schooled in the deeper mysteries of life, and he could not help feeling very keenly the great loss that had come to him. With his darling mother gone out of his life forever, we can easily picture the lonely life of the boy, who with heavy heart began his studies in medicine at the university. But Mrs. Atherton proved a second mother to him. She took the boy into her own large, warm heart and cared for him as zealously as she would have done for her own child.

Two—three years passed swiftly on, and Time, the gentle healer of great sorrows, set Charles' thoughts upon pleasanter ways. Mrs. Atherton felt elated at the boy's progress and success. For three terms he had carried off the annual scholarship—not an easy task—and the faculty necessarily were proud of their student.

The last months of the fourth year were closing in rapidly. Charles was busy preparing for the final examinations and inci-

dentally to land the scholarship a fourth time—God willing!

One evening Mrs. Atherton returned somewhat late. The train from Kettleboro, whither she had gone to spend the afternoon with a friend, arrived several hours after time. To her surprise she noticed a light in Charles' room. "What could he be doing up at this time of night?" she thought. Just then the city clock struck twelve. Perhaps he was ill. A sickly feeling pierced her heart, and in a minute she stood at his door. There was a gentle rap and a tired voice from within called: "Come in!"

"Charles, what are you doing up so late? You should have been in bed long ago. I do not like to see you poreing over those books at this hour. It will be the death of you yet."

Her voice had a note of anger in it and Charles did not altogether like the sound of it.

"Ah, Mrs. Atherton, do not scold me! We have a "grind" on to-morrow. Dr. Bates is the examiner, and he gets so sarcastic and ugly if one's answers are not full and to the point. And then, just think of it, one week more and I will have to write for the degree."

"Yes, child, I know. But you have studied so faithfully all year, you do not need all this extra preparation."

"But, Mrs. Atherton, I would like to carry off the scholarship again."

"You have done so three times, Charles. Is not that sufficient?"

"If it falls to my lot again think of what it will mean to me."

"Only a few paltry dollars as on the previous occasions."

"Ah, no! more than that. The winner of the scholarship in the final year is entitled to a year's post-graduate course abroad which means in round numbers about two thousand dollars. Is this not worth the effort?"

"It is worth working for, Charles, certainly, but then it is not necessary in your case. If you should like a year or even a few years abroad I should be glad to help you. I do not mind advancing the money for it all. It is only a pleasure and a very great one to serve you, but I do not like to see you working so hard. Take things a little easy and all good things will come to you in time."

"Thank you, Mrs. Atherton, you are very kind. But think how good that year abroad would make me feel knowing that I had earned it myself."

"But come, Charles," interrupted the good woman, "close your books! You are tired, I know. Let us go down stairs for a cup of tea and then we will talk over that ocean trip."

A pleasant smile stole into the student's face and made it really beautiful.

Graduation night arrived in good time. The evening papers of the night previous had printed the names of the successful M. D's. In large black type one read that Charles Mathers, aged twenty-four, was the successful winner of the Harvey Scholarship. There was also a note that he had been the only man in the history of the school, who had ever carried off the scholarship for four successive terms. The auditorium was packed to the doors. Thousands were anxious to see the young doctor who was destined to enter the halls of the great universities of Europe. Mrs. Atherton's heart beat with joy. It had only one regret. The dear woman could not help wishing that his mother might have been a witness to it all. This same regret also echoed in the boy's heart while humbly he accepted the congratulations of hundreds of his friends.

Before he left his room that evening, Mrs. Atherton entered with a telegram. Nervously he opened and read it.

“From Stanford!” he exclaimed as his eyes met Mrs. Atherton’s. Then he read loudly—

“Congratulations! May God be good to you!

THADY CHARLTON.”

“Poor Thady!” he remarked, overcome with emotion as he folded carefully the little piece of yellow paper. “How good of him to remember me!”

Instantly his thoughts stole to Stanford—beautiful spot ever green in his memory—lying asleep in the cradle of the strong, everlasting hills. The music of the early days came into his young heart and filled it with half joy, half sorrow. Then in fancy he wandered back to his own home, plain, little house on a quiet street, but no one seemed to answer his knock on the door. The voice of the canary inside, sweet and familiar, sounded no more. The flowers had wilted in their pots. There was a solemn stillness all over the place. He heard nothing but his own footsteps on the creaking stairs. His quaint study upstairs seemed cheerful enough. There was Thady’s painting on the wall in all its splendor, and on the other side the orderly rows of precious books. But the life of the old home was gone. A sickly feel-

ing came over him for a moment, and his face clearly showed signs of deep emotion. Memory had just then painted him a picture of his mother as he had seen her the last time; and now on the eve of his greatness he longed for the gentle press of her hand. But alas! he knew that such a pleasure was forever denied him—poor boy!

Mrs. Atherton did not like to see the little rain of tears on Charles' cheeks.

"What's the matter, Charles?" she asked kindly. "This should be the happiest night in all your life and I do not like to see you feeling bad."

"Oh, it is nothing much. Poor Thady's telegram took me back to Stanford for a moment and I thought of mother. That's all. Oh, if she were only here to-night! This is the broken link in all my chain of happiness. My soul seems to pause and wait for the touch of her pure fingers but—"

"Never mind, Charles. Have courage! I am sure two eyes are watching you in heaven to-night."

At the auditorium Charles was the cynosure of many eyes. He looked so manly in his black, silken gown and, when he rose for the conferring of the degree and the Harvey Scholarship, the large packed hall fairly thundered its volumes of applause.

Even when the noise had partly died away below, the students in the various balconies above took up the echo and cheered the young doctor lustily, for no one was so universally loved as Charles.

Two months later Dr. Mathers set sail for Europe. Two people were at the depot to see him off—Mrs. Atherton and Father Salvini.

“Good bye, Charles!” the little woman cried after him as the train started out of Billington. “Be a good boy and write often and remember that you have a friend whose purse is always open to you!”



### Chapter VIII.—The Man From Paris.

Two years passed quickly. One day in late November Mrs. Atherton and Father Salvini chanced to meet on one of the downtown streets. It was a cold, cheerless day, with heavy gray clouds in the skies overhead. Everywhere the crowds were hurrying along, anxious to reach their homes. It was the noon hour. Mrs. Atherton had a troubled look in her eyes and felt glad just then to have come across her good friend so unexpectedly.

“Any news from Charles lately?” the priest asked, good-naturedly.

“Yes. I had a long letter from him last evening. He is getting along nicely and has been appointed one of the resident-surgeons in one of the large London hospitals. He likes his work immensely, and besides during spare hours there are a thousand and one things for the stranger to see in old London. He seems so fond of Europe I am afraid we will have a hard time coaxing him back to America.”

“I am glad to hear such good account of the boy,” Father Salvini remarked, “but I always said he was the making of a solid



man and that he would chisel out a career for himself."

"He seems to have taken such a fancy to surgery. Goodness gracious! that would be the last thing on earth to appeal to me. Ugh!" And the woman fairly shuddered.

"Ah, my dear madam, it is a difficult thing to master, but the knife in the skillful surgeon's hand has saved millions of lives, and some day no doubt we will hear of Charles' skill. It is good that he went to London. There he will come in contact with all that is new in medicine and surgery."

The priest's eyes stole to the woman's face.

"Mrs. Atherton," he continued, "I am afraid you have not been well lately. Your eyes show it."

"I will confess that I have not been well, Father. I have suffered no bodily pain, but trouble and worry have been gnawing at my very heart almost continually for some time."

"What has happened?" asked the priest, somewhat anxiously.

"A great deal in the past few months—more than I dare tell. My heart has been fairly crushed. Of course you know all about the fire. Two weeks ago my two large stores were burned to the ground. They

were insured for a mere trifle, and the fire has cost me thousands of dollars."

"Yes, that was a great loss, Mrs. Ather-ton," he interrupted, sympathetically.

"But that is nothing compared to another. You remember my only sister's child—Arthur Neville? I had him with me here after his mother's death for a number of years. His father died you know when he was still a babe in arms."

"Arthur Neville? Ah, yes. The clever chap who traveled so much through Europe and amassed a large fortune by means of various financial investments abroad."

"Yes, that is the lad. He came to see me about three months ago. He is a man of thirty-five now, erect, active, and quite good looking. I had not seen him in fifteen years though we corresponded at regular intervals. Arthur was always a great pet of mine. Isabelle's untimely death had left him a very young orphan and consequently I always kept a warm spot in my heart for him."

"Yes, he must be quite a man now," said Father Salvini. "Is he married?"

"No, not yet. He said, however, that before very long the event was to take place. He had just arrived from Paris to attend to some necessary transactions."

"And pray who is the lucky lady?"

“A Mademoiselle Colette Berthier, daughter of Pierre Berthier, one of the richest bankers in Paris. Arthur showed me her photograph. She is young, but quite ordinary looking. They expected, he said, to be married in about a month. But let me resume my story. Arthur came to me for help. He told me he had invested almost all of his money so foolishly that it brought him no returns whatever. He had placed most of it on real estate. You know Isabelle left him a goodly fortune. He told me that a debt of fifteen thousand dollars was staring him in the face which had to be paid at a certain specified time or he would have to go to prison for it. The disgrace of it all would ruin him in Paris, and Colette Berthier, he was sure, would be woman enough to refuse his hand in marriage. Once married to Colette her vast fortune would fall to his lot and he would be in a position to pay me back the fifteen thousand, if I would be good enough to lend him the sum.”

“Did you question him at all about his business matters?”

“Yes. He told me plausible stories, even showed me documents and books full of names and figures. He said that he had purchased a large dry-goods store in Paris, that it had always been an elephant on his

hands and had never paid him, and that he needed fifteen thousand dollars to pay off his creditors. An intimate friend of his, he added, had been good enough to lend him an equal amount."

"And of course you lent him the fifteen thousand?"

"Yes, Father, I did. That very evening we went to the lawyer's office and Arthur signed papers to the effect that one month after date he would pay back the borrowed money."

"Did he remain in Billington long after that particular evening?"

"No. He remained only two days. He said that he had so little time to spare, and added that Colette was waiting for him in Paris to be married immediately on his return. He promised me that they would return to Billington on their wedding tour in a few weeks. Three months have now passed, the note lies unpaid in the lawyer's hands, and not a line has come from Arthur Neville to explain matters. I have heard nothing even of his marriage to Colette Berthier."

The poor woman's heart seemed filled with strange misgivings. Father Salvini pitied her in her distress. He tried to console her with excuses that his own manly

sympathy conjured up—but alas! Mrs. Atherton had seen another light creep over the strange horizon. For days Arthur Neville's name had hung on her lips. She could not sleep. In vain she prayed and asked that God might close her eyes, but there, before her on the very wall, she could read the swindler's name in bright, glaring letters. Go where she might he stood before her, the fine, oily villain whom she had loved deeply for her sister's sake. The recent fire had burned a large hole into her purse, and now, if this fifteen thousand was also gone—terrible thought—she would be crippled financially. Then her thoughts would steal over to that hospital in London and she would see Dr. Charles flitting about on his errands of mercy among the pale sufferers, and her heart would almost break. Not that she loved money, but the thought of having been reduced so suddenly to the verge of poverty fairly appalled her.

Mrs. Atherton and Father Salvini had now reached the old marble gate in front of St. Jerome's.

"Why did you not tell me your troubles before, Mrs. Atherton?" the gentle Italian asked kindly. "It is really too bad you should have carried all this burden yourself."

"It is kind of you to speak thus, Father, but until two weeks ago I had hopes that Arthur would turn up with his bride and bring the money with him. Then Mr. Jones, my lawyer, called on me and urged me to wait no longer, but put Parisian detectives on his track and arrest him. He was poor Isabelle's child, Father, and daily I had trusted in my darling sister in heaven to help clear up the matter. She was always so good, and I could not picture her only child a scoundrel and a swindler. I finally consented to have the police of Paris make a thorough search of the city and cable their findings to the detectives here. Only an hour ago Mr. Jones telephoned that a cablegram had arrived from Paris, and asked me to call at his office. I had expected to drop in at St. Jerome's on the way down to tell you all. But now that you have heard the first part of the story, I wish you would come along with me to Mr. Jones' office and hear the closing chapters. I am prepared now to face the worst."

The poor woman in black trembled visibly and Father Salvini pitied her. In a few minutes the two sat in Mr. Jones' office.

"Any new developments, Mr. Jones?" Mrs. Atherton questioned eagerly.

"Yes—" and the lawyer's voice halted—"but I am afraid they hold but little encouragement." Then he continued in measured speech: "This morning Chief Miles received a cablegram from Chief Lafleur of the Paris force stating that an extensive search of the whole city had failed to bring to light anything concerning Arthur Neville."

"Could they not find out anything at his dry-goods store?" questioned Father Salvini quickly.

"They cabled that there is no such store in all Paris," replied Miles, "and no business man by such a name."

"What about Colette Berthier, the daughter of the wealthy French banker?" asked Mrs. Atherton. "Did he not marry her?"

"The police report," the old detective answered, "that they searched carefully all the directories of Paris for the name of Pierre Berthier and failed to find it. They even visited all the banks, and it ended in a fruitless search. The name of Pierre Berthier had never appeared on the books of any of the banking institutions of Paris."

By this time Mrs. Atherton was beyond herself. The news had been too much for her. She threw up her hands in despair and

shrieked in all her grief: "I am ruined!—ruined! and all through Isabelle's child!"

The distracted woman wept like a child. It was a touching scene and much pity was felt for her in the hearts of the three men who stood witnesses to proceedings so pathetic and heart-rending.

Some days later word came to Detective Miles that Arthur Neville had sailed for India instead of France. And from that day to this no one has ever heard of him. The search was kept up for a number of years and finally abandoned.

The fifteen thousand was gone forever and Mrs. Atherton, poor, little, suffering woman, bore her leaden cross willingly and tried to shut out from her mind forever all memory of the treachery and deceit of Isabelle's only child.





## **Chapter IX.—Christmas Eve.**

Dr. Mathers' sojourn in England was nearing its end and the young man's thoughts were turning toward Billington. During the years he had been away he had grown intellectually, and the big brainy surgeons at the hospital prophesied a brilliant career for the young surgeon. Another two weeks and then he would have to bid good-bye to all his dear English friends and leave the noise and all the strange, wild, exciting life of old London behind him. Even now it all seemed like a dream to him—his coming to the city, the making of new friends; his interesting days at the hospital and the little confidences the leaders of medicine and surgery shared with him; the glorious sight-seeing and the interesting visits to the homes of the great in literature, art and the sciences. Oh, he would miss it all even though his thoughts were turning Billingtonwards. He also felt anxious to take up the fight of life—out there somewhere, where God would see fit to place him, and his heart urged him to go. His months at the hospital with the sick and the suffering—ah! they had been after all the

greenest and pleasantest in all his life—and, when thoughts of his leave-taking filled his mind, a feeling of pain stole into his heart.

It was Christmas Eve—the last Yule-tide that Mathers was to spend in the hospital. The corridors, private rooms and wards were festooned gaily with wreaths of holly and mistletoe. The nurses had been busy all day decorating so that the patients, who were unfortunate enough to be in the hospital over Christmas, would also feel a touch of gladness in their hearts at the most joyous season of the year. All day long flowers and gifts arrived at the House of Pain, and all day long countless hands were busy arranging and carrying the precious bundles to their various destinations. Out in the corridors there was a continual patter of hurrying feet. It sounded like a falling of rain upon a thatched roof. Even Dr. Mathers enjoyed the bustle and excitement and worked good-naturedly with the Sisters and the nurses to help bring feelings of happiness to the hearts of the many sufferers in their neat, white beds.

The spirit of Christmas had stolen into his heart and made him very happy. The hospital had been transformed into a flower-garden. Even the sickest patients could not help smiling in their narrow beds. It all

made Charles feel as he had never felt before. For the present he forgot his own little worries and troubles and worked and laughed and chatted briskly. He felt glad to be alive—glad to be able to help brighten lives, that knew much of life's shadow and little of its sunshine.

Sister Margaret and he were now putting the finishing touches on one of the children's wards. The active, merry occupants of the pretty white beds kept the room fairly alive with excitement and laughter. The doctor loved the little ones. Whenever he had a half hour to spare he sought their companionship, and it always refreshed him.

"Do you know, Sister," he said thoughtfully as he fastened the last holly wreath on the wall, "I think a child is the sweetest, loveliest thing on earth."

And he was right. An innocent, white-souled child! On its pure soul ever lingers the benediction that has fallen from God's finger, and from its lips—two roses blown apart—many a bird-like, cheery message takes wings and flies into the empty cages of our hearts to give us a glimpse of that gentle, brooding peace and happiness we all ardently long for.

When the two left the children's ward all the little patients seemed happy save one.

He was the little five-year-old who had seen his third day out of bed after a very critical operation. The child had been picked up in the slums, taken to the hospital and operated upon. In a short time the little waif won his way into the hearts of everyone. He was so thin and frail looking that everybody pitied him, and in time he grew to be rather a spoiled child. But he was bright and his two little blue eyes fairly danced when he smiled, and he generally smiled upon all who passed his little bed.

"Sissi Marg'et!" he called out tearfully as the gentle nun disappeared with Dr. Mathers.

"Doctor, you must come and see the crib in the chapel. It is just beautiful!" Sister Margaret remarked as they passed into the hall. "Ah! there goes little Patsy—he is crying." The nurses had named the five-year-old Patsy for short.

"Sissi Marg'et!" again came the shrill cry.

"Just a minute, doctor. I must see what the child wants." And the kind nun re-entered the children's ward.

"Sissi Marg'et! Take me wiv' 'oo."

A minute later the nun joined Charles with Patsy in her arms.

"Patsy's a bad boy," teasingly uttered Charles.

"Not bad boy—no!" answered the youngster.

"Ah, yes. Patsy's a bad boy, cries like a baby," the doctor continued as he pinched the little one's red cheeks with his fingers.

"Sissi Marg'et!" spoke up the little one as he gazed into her face. "Me—good boy? Isn't me, Sissi Marg'et?"

"Sometimes, Patsy," the nun answered, kissing him tenderly.

Charles gave vent to a laugh which the child did not like.

"Go way!" the youngster cried as he motioned the doctor aside angrily. Then he buried his face in the nun's snowy guimpe and mumbled: "Me not like dat man. Me only likes Sissi Marg'et, don't me, Sissi?"

By this time they had come to the chapel door and Sister Margaret put Patsy on his feet.

"Now, Patsy, I am going to take you into church," she said. The child opened its eyes wildly. He had never heard the word "church" in all his life. He did not know what it meant.

"Patsy, I want you to be good in there. I want you to come in and see the dear little Jesus in his crib—in his bed."

The boy's eyes opened widely. Somewhat puzzled his look stole up to the doctor's face and then back again to the nun's. He did not seem to understand.

"Come, Patsy, let us go in now and see little Jesus in the crib." The nun stooped to take his tiny hand in hers and led him in. But he shook himself away from her and exclaimed with all the innocence of a child: "No! I won't doe in. I'm dust as beeg boy as 'e is and dust as old, if 'e vants do see me 'e can come out here." And Patsy stamped his foot as if he really meant it.

The speech was too much for the nun and the doctor and both laughed heartily. It sounded rather disrespectful, but the child was only five and fresh from the slums at that.

With some coaxing Patsy at last entered the chapel with Sister Margaret and the two made their way up the narrow aisle to the candle-lit manger in the corner. He had never seen anything like this in all his life. His eyes rested long on the little Infant so beautiful and life-like, and then he smiled upon the miniature sheep, oxen, and shepherds on the hill-sides."

"Oh, Sissi Marg'et!" he exclaimed as he clapped his hands. "Hasn't 'e got many toys to play wiv'. Will 'oo bring me in

again so I can play wiv' him? 'E is a nice boy. Sissi, an' I like 'im so much."

The nun tried her best to silence the child's tongue, but without avail. There were quite a number kneeling around absorbed in prayer, and she did not wish Patsy to disturb them. However, they had heard the childish remarks and smiles had stolen unbidden to the faces of all.

When some minutes later Charles returned to his room a number of bundles lay on his table. His friends, at least some of them, had been kind enough to remember him.

A cold wind was blowing without, rattling through the bare trees. Charles stirred the fire in the grate and heaped on an extra supply of coal. Then, in the gathering twilight, he mused for some time, his thoughts adrift on various ways.

Now that he was all alone with himself the old feelings stole back and he pictured all the Christmasses of those years in Stanford. But a few minutes before he had said a long prayer in the chapel for his darling mother whose smile always brought Christmas to his heart. He pictured her again sweet and motherly as of old, and memory recalled the many pictures that Love had hung on the walls of the Past.

As he continued to gaze into the burning coals another face appeared to rise from them. It was Mrs. Atherton's. Only last night he had dreamed a terrible dream about the good woman. There was the face again, and the same dreadful dream came back to him. He tried to brush her face from his eyes, but he could not. It still shone before him, but it was no longer the bright, happy, cheerful face he had always known. Alas! now it was shrunken, tear-stained.

A shudder of fear crept over the doctor. His thoughts nearly unnerved him. For three months a cloud of mystery had hung over him. He had worried a great deal and his face was beginning to show it. Three months ago he had received his last letter from Mrs. Atherton. It was not a very cheerful message. The dear soul had written him of the Arthur Neville affair and out of sympathy for her he sent her a consoling letter and followed it with regular weekly missives, but to this day he had not received an answer to any of them. He was now beginning to have strange misgivings. Where could the woman have gone? If she was in Billington still, then, surely, his letters had reached her. As a last resort he had written Father Salvini about the matter, but, up to the present, no word had come from him.



This had been the last straw of hope to which the poor boy clung.

The room had now grown quite dark, but Charles still sat gazing into the leaping flames. It did not seem to be a bright Christmas eve after all. There was a gnawing at his heart—the cause of all his strange discomfort.

Presently there was a rap at the door and Sister Margaret entered.

“Ah, the room is dark,” she exclaimed. “Are you in, doctor?”

“Yes, Sister. Just a minute until I light the gas.”

“See, doctor. I have a whole armful of mail for you. The postman has just brought it. The hospital was well remembered this Christmas. The poor fellow was loaded down with the weight of it,” and she handed him an armful of papers, letters and parcels.

Charles smiled for a moment as he hurried through the letters.

“Pray, Sister, be seated a minute! I just feel lonely tonight and long to have somebody to talk to.” Again his eyes followed the writing on the envelopes. “Ah, yes! here is one from poor Thady. I would recognize his writing amongst a thousand letters—and there is one from Father Salvini. Just the one I have been looking for.”

He tore the letter open hurriedly and read the contents eagerly. Then a heavy sigh escaped his lips and he grew deadly pale and sank into a chair. For a few minutes he did not speak.

“You remember, Sister, of my speaking to you the other day of Mrs. Atherton’s apparent neglect in answering my letters,” he at last began. Sister Margaret practically knew all the doctors affairs. She was the only one in the whole hospital to whom the young man had ever confided.

“Well, Sister, my good friend, Father Salvini, here writes me a short letter but—I am afraid it contains very bad news for me. I shall read it to you—

‘My Dear Charles—

Your letter reached me a few moments ago. I know you are anxious about Mrs. Atherton and I shall not keep you in suspense any longer. Owing to her great losses the poor woman’s mind became affected and I had her removed to a home in charge of the Sisters. She still had a little money of her own, but she was eventually forced to close the doors of her mansion on Grosvenor street. It all preyed upon her so strongly that in a very short time she became a changed woman. Her mind wandered at times, but she was perfectly harmless. One

day she went out driving with one of the nuns and, while the latter was in shopping, she alighted from the buggy and disappeared in the crowded street. And from that day to this no one has ever seen or heard of the poor woman. Exhaustive searches have been made, but in vain. Some imagine that she left the city by rail; others claim she is still within the city's limits, while the majority seem to think she has been the victim of foul play. I know you will feel bad when you read this, yet no more than I. But you are to be with us soon again and then I will tell you all. In closing let me wish you all the joys of this festive season! Believe me,

Sincerely your friend,

ANTONIO SALVINI."

"Now what do you think of all this, Sister? Poor Mrs. Atherton! She was such a good woman. To think that such a misfortune should have befallen her!"

"You must not complain. A God in heaven permitted it all and for the best."

"But I shall never see her face—"

"You do not know, doctor. Stranger meetings have happened before."

"Yes, but nobody seems to know anything about her, and perhaps even now, God

knows, she may be lying dead—somewhere, and I, thousand of miles away! Ah, Sister, I shall never meet Mrs. Atherton in this life again. I feel it.”

Overcome with grief Charles tore the letter into shreds and threw the little pieces into the flames.

“Trust in divine Providence!” the good Sister spoke in parting. “No one knows, but that your paths may yet lead to the same common cross-roads.” And quietly she left the room.

For some time Charles sat alone in the quiet night and stared into the bright coals. When the last piece of the ill-fated letter had crumbled to ashes a sigh escaped his lips and he whispered sadly: “Poor Mrs. Atherton! I wonder where she is!”



## **Chapter X.—The Woman in Black**

Mrs. Atherton was practically alone in the world. She had had an only sister—Isabelle, the mother of the despicable Arthur Neville. One uncle was all that was left to her, and he lived in far away Japan. One friend, however, still clung to her at Beresvale, and thither she went the day she made good her escape from the nun's carriage.

Billington was no longer the same to her now that she had become so reduced in circumstances. Many of the friends, who once sipped tea with her at brilliant social functions, now passed her by with the coldness of strangers. It was a stinging blow and it went to the poor woman's heart with double force. To be sure she found sunshine itself in Father Salvini's counsel. When poverty almost stared her in the face it was he who had her removed to the Sister's Home. The nuns were good to her and she was grateful for their many kindnesses, but she could not feel contented. Worry had helped to bring on the diseased condition of her mind. She would take strange freaks periodically, and would often break into spells of weeping that almost broke her heart. But they could

only last for a little while and then she would be herself again. Her appearance was also changing. She was getting thinner, paler and older looking.

It was after one of these depressing attacks that she remarked to Sister Patricia as the two walked down the well-kept garden-path: "Do you know, Sister, life does not hold forth to me the joys it did only a year ago. Since these heavy losses have come upon me I feel strangely at times. And then, what have I to live for?"

"Ah, my dear, you have much to live for. Just think of your preparation for that other, larger, higher life, and then you have Charles Mathers, the dear boy, to live for. You have always been a second mother to him, and in a few months he will be back in Billington again with you, to pay the debt he owes you."

"No, Sister, Charles shall not meet me here in Billington, believe me, when he returns. I want to be far away when that time comes. He has been a good boy and I love him, but I must go away. He needs help—money—now, more than ever, and I am not in a position to give him any."

"But, Mrs. Atherton, I am sure Charles will be able to look out for himself when he begins the battle of life, and incidentally

help you along as well. But, then, you know you are welcome to a home with us here for the remaining days of your life."

"Sister, I will only be an incumbrance to him and to you all. The struggle will be difficult enough for him without having to take care of me. You know I have a little money to do me for a while, and then I can work. I will be glad to commence life all over again, providing God does not deny me health and strength."

"Mrs. Atherton! I do not like to hear you talk in this strain. I know you are not going to leave us. What would Dr. Mathers say to find you gone from Billington?"

Mrs. Atherton looked up at the tall, saintly-looking nun at her side.

"Dr. Mathers, did you say?" she whispered. "Poor boy!" She caught her white linen apron in her hands and lifted it to her face and wept like a child. The little rain of tears was soon over.

"Never mind, Charles!" she began. "Some day, when he is nicely settled, I shall write him, but for a time he must not know where I am."

"You are not going away, Mrs. Atherton? How I would miss you."

"No, not at present, good Sister," she answered as her thin hand stole into the

nun's. For a few moments both walked on in silence.

All through life Sister Patricia and Mrs. Atherton had been close, intimate friends. They had been companions at school in their early days.

The peaceful chapel chimes beat out upon the evening air. In the skies above the pink-tinted clouds were fast disappearing. A strong breeze stole through the bushes like a fleet hound, and there was a strange whispering of the dying, autumn leaves.

"There! The chimes are ringing and I must be off to vespers. Let me hope you will be in better spirits tomorrow, Mrs. Atherton."

The shy nun was leaving, but the woman's voice called her back.

"Sister Patricia!"

"What is it?"

"Promise me that you will never mention what I have said to a soul! I do not want it to come to Father Salvini's ears. I am sure he would never listen to my story. He would stand in the path I have mapped out for myself and hold me back."

"I promise! Then you have fully decided to leave us at some time in the near future?"

"I have, Sister."

"And pray, where are you going!"

"The Years between."



"That I cannot answer at present. When I have reached my destination you shall receive a line from me, but remember that you keep my whereabouts a secret."

"I promise to keep secret all you have told me, but I will pray hard that you will not leave Billington. Really, Mrs. Atherton, I do not like to see you go."

That evening, as Sister Patricia knelt in the chapel, she mused within herself: "I wonder if I do wrong by keeping Mrs. Atherton's secret?" A pleasant voice however, spoke to her doubting conscience: "By no means, my child."

Some weeks later Sister Patricia was stricken down with a severe illness, and her soul's journey across the misty horizon was but an entrance into the Heaven of which she had so often dreamed.

The gentle nun therefore was not destined long to keep the distressed woman's secret, and thus in the community no one suspected the plans of Mrs. Atherton. She was only waiting a good opportunity to carry them into effect. It came the day she drove down town with the nun who made the daily purchases for the institution. There was a great celebration on in the convent. A number of the novices were to take the veil. The Bishop and some clergy and a number of

invited guests were expected, and with all the bustle and excitement Mrs. Atherton thought she would not be missed until evening. Then it would be too late to search for her.

The day broke beautiful and clear. Mrs. Atherton rose very early and looked out across the sun-lit landscape. The nuns were already stirring like busy bees. As the poor woman gazed out of her window a feeling of homesickness stole into her heart. Billington was after all a beautiful spot in her memory. She recalled the fifty years that had passed over her head; and now, in this last hour of parting, she was loath to go and leave so many things behind in the dear old city which she had loved deeply and well. Her early years blossomed again—fresh and flowery in the sun and star-light. She walked with her husband and child through asphodelian meadows. Then her thoughts travelled back to Stanford and Mrs. Mathers—poor Minnie—and to Charles, and, as she closed the window to shut out the picture she had painted on the morning skies forever from her eyes, the tears fell heavily.

Sister Philomene met her in the hall a few minutes later.

“Mrs. Atherton,” she exclaimed, “you do

not look well this morning. Your eyes seem heavy. Have you not slept well?"

"Not very well, Sister."

"I think a drive this morning would do you a world of good. Would you like to come to town with me?"

The invitation suited Mrs. Atherton's plans as she wanted to reach town as early as possible in order to catch the nine-thirty train for Beresvale.

"But you will miss the ceremony," the nun added.

"Oh, never mind it. I have been a witness to many such."

Some minutes later the two went speeding down the streets. Mrs. Atherton was clothed in a deep black dress and, contrary to her usual custom, also wore a thick, black veil.

Sister Philomene could not understand the necessity of a thick veil on so warm and pleasant a morning and remarked somewhat abruptly to her friend: "Mrs. Atherton, do you know I have never seen you wear a black veil before, and it seems strange that you should wear one on such a beautiful morning as this."

"I seldom wear a veil, Sister, it is true, but, somehow or other, my eyes looked bad, and I did not want anyone to catch a glimpse of them. To be honest with you,

Sister, when you noticed this morning that my eyes looked heavy, it was not the loss of sleep that gave them such an appearance. I had had a little crying spell just before."

"A rain of tears on such a sunny, cheerful day? Well! well! the two are almost incompatible. Really, Mrs. Atherton, I do not like the look of that black cloth over your face."

"Never mind, Sister, we all do very funny things at times. Don't we?" And she laughed gently.

The wearing of the veil was by no means "a funny thing". In Mrs. Atherton's mind it was a prearranged affair.

When Sister Philomene entered the large dry-goods store, after having tied the horse securely, the deeply-veiled woman suddenly rose from her seat in the carriage, stepped to the pavement and was soon lost in the crowds of people on the street.

On her way to the depot she met many people whom she knew, but they did not recognize her. The black veil covered her face and she was satisfied. As she hurried past she seemed to hear shrill cries of "Come back! Come back!" But her heart urged her on in feverish excitement.

She was now turning the last corner, but a few yards from the depot. To the wo-

man's utter amazement she saw Father Salvini on the opposite side of the street. He only threw a passing glance at her and walked on. At the moment she felt like tearing the veil from her face and hurrying over to him and telling him all. He had been a good friend to her through many years, but she guessed what he would question her now, and she did not care to have him speak. It would have killed her to have stayed in Billington another month. She knew that Charles was expected home at any time and she did not want to be there when he arrived.

Mrs. Atherton stood still for a moment looking at the figure of Father Salvini disappearing down the street. The poor woman paused at the cross-roads, not knowing which road to take.

The train whistled shrilly near by. In another minute it would be leaving for Beresvale, and Mrs. Atherton hurried to the depot and boarded her car just as the train was moving out.

Beresvale was reached in good time and Mrs. Atherton's visit to the cottage of her friend on the hill, that overlooked the peaceful, little rural town, was to be in the nature of a surprise. Like herself, her old friend, Ellen Allan, had also become reduced in cir-

cumstances. Only recently a sort of sympathy had stolen in between the two and drawn them closer together. Then came a letter from Miss Allan begging Mrs. Atherton to come and spend the winter with her, now that she was left alone. The letter arrived at a time when Mrs. Atherton was planning a change and consequently her thoughts at once stole to Beresvale.

When Mrs. Atherton reached the little thatched cottage she expected to see Ellen running out to meet her. But no one came that solitary autumn afternoon to take her by the hand. With strange misgivings she knocked at the weather-beaten door, but a sighing breeze, rattling through the deserted trees, alone made answer. Again she knocked, but still no Ellen. Then she opened the door widely and entered the house.

From a room nearby came a sickly, weak voice: "Come in! I can't leave my bed to-day. If it's the baker or grocer or— Why! it's you, Mrs. Atherton!"

It was a happy meeting. They had not seen each other for years.

"When did you come, Mae?"

"Just a few minutes ago."

"Oh, I am so sorry I am sick. This morning a sharp pain pierced my left side and I

have lain here helpless all day. But 'twill be better by morning I am sure."

Ellen had a spell of coughing just then which almost prostrated her.

"I think you had better have a doctor, Ellen. I shall go out at once for one."

Some minutes later Mrs. Atherton disappeared down the avenue of spruce trees in search of the nearest doctor.

Ellen was found to be very ill, and the doctor stated that he entertained slight hopes of her recovery. So Mrs. Atherton, as best she could, tried to make the poor woman comfortable. Two weeks later a funeral cortege passed down the lonely road bearing Ellen to her last resting place.

One evening when life hung merely by a thread, Ellen called Mrs. Atherton to her side and whispered feebly: "Mae, you have been so kind to me, and all I have in this world I leave to you. This little cottage shall be your own when I am gone. Make a nice home of it, Mae! You deserved a better one wherein to spend your last days, but it is warm and cozy and you will have at least one spot you can call your own."

Thus the home of Ellen Allan became the home of Mrs. Atherton, and here the latter lived for a number of years in sweet seclusion, her sorrows and crosses her very own.

## Chapter XI.—An Early Caller

It was a winter morning, late in January. The long silent stretches of God's white out-of-doors looked silvery in the sunlight. There was a hint of modesty on everything around, yet the heart of humanity throbbed on, steeped in sin and shame.

It was rather early for a caller to disturb Father Salvini's morning hour. He was assorting the morning mail when a rap at his door drew his attention from the papers and letters in front of him. Sitting with his back to the door and, thinking it only a student on some trivial errand, he exclaimed in a soft musical voice:—

“Come in!”

The door opened and the caller entered. It was no other than Dr. Mathers, just arrived from England.

Father Salvini, without even turning his head, looked over the letters and muttered thoughtlessly: “Just a minute until I have assorted the letters, and then I will listen to your tale of woe.”

A few minutes later the priest rose from his chair and turning, was completely taken



by surprise when his eyes fell upon Charles Mathers.

“Good heavens, Charles! How are you? Welcome home! I am so glad to see you.”

Father Salvini clapped him on the shoulder and sized him up from foot to head. Charles had improved wonderfully in looks, had gained in avoirdupois, and was withal really a handsome man—erect, manly and distinguished looking.

It did Father Salvini’s heart good to look upon the young surgeon.

“When did you arrive, Charles?” he asked, inquisitively.

“But ten minutes ago.”

“And am I really the first person to see you in Billington?”

“The first, Father.”

“Now are you sure, Charles, that some one else—some fashionable young lady—was not at the depot to meet you?” the priest asked laughingly.

“No, Father. I came here unknown to any one.”

“Well! well! then I see that you have not yet given your heart away. Surgery and love do not mix well, my boy—eh?” laughed the jolly priest, good-naturedly.

“How did you like England, Charles?”

"Very well, Father. But I am glad to get home again. Have you heard any more of Mrs. Atherton?" He had come expecting to find her in Billington.

"Where is she?" he asked again.

"Charles, I do not know. No one has heard of her since the day she escaped from the nun's carriage. At first we thought her the victim of foul play, but a package found in her room the day after added a new chapter to the story. You see, the day she left was a busy one at the convent and little attention was given the nun's story of Mrs. Atherton's strange leave-taking. The Superior thought that she had probably met a friend downtown and had gone to her home for the day, but, when the night closed in and her bed was still empty, the hearts of the nuns sank."

"Was she ever known to have stayed out at night before?" Charles asked nervously.

"No. It was this that aroused the nuns' suspicions. The next morning, however, one of them came across a letter in her room addressed to the Superior. It contained one hundred dollars in bills, accompanied by the following note:

"'May God reward you all for your goodness to me! I am leaving Billington to-day—perhaps forever. Please accept the en-

closed for the poor and the orphans, and never cease praying for

Mae Atherton.' ”

The young doctor's hopes sank gradually. He had expected to return to Billington and help provide for the woman who had been a second mother to him. But now his plans were dashed to pieces.

“And is there no one here,” he asked, “who saw her leave or to whom she entrusted her secret?”

“No one, Charles. For some weeks we searched for her but could not discover the slightest clew to the strange mystery. I think probably she has gone off somewhere to spend the remainder of her days in quiet. Billington never did seem the same to her after those terrible reverses. Did you hear of them, Charles?”

“Yes, Father. She wrote and told me all, and—yet her letters were so cheerful.”

“She always put the best side out. From external appearances no one would ever have thought that woman a sufferer, but God knew the leaden weight of her cross. Did she write you again after the Neville affair?”

“No, that was the last letter I received. I wrote her frequently after that, but never

received a reply. I grew uneasy and wrote you. Your letter arrived Christmas eve."

"Christmas eve? Ah! that was too bad. I am sure you must have had a very lonely Christmas."

"Yes, Father, it was a lonely Christmas—probably the loneliest in all my life. I had never dreamt of receiving such news from you. You can easily imagine my surprise. I am sure we shall never see her face again. She was so good and kind, and it almost breaks my heart to think she has gone. Perhaps even now she is wanting for something."

"Never mind, Charles. You will have to make the best of it now. By the way, about a month ago, I was the means of bringing you bad news, but I think I have something good to tell you now. Where do you intend practicing?"

"I do not know, Father, but I would like to practice in Billington."

"A capital idea, Charles! You could not start in a better locality. But listen, I have something to tell you."

Father Salvini turned slightly in his chair. There was a merry twinkle in his eye, and he continued:

"Who do you think called in to see me yesterday about yourself?"

“About me?”

“Yes—about you.”

“I have not the slightest idea.”

“Well—it was one of the big men of the city, one of the shining lights in your profession—a surgeon. Can you guess?”

“Dr. McCracken?” questioned Charles, interestedly.”

“Yes. That’s the man.”

“And he inquired after me, did you say? I feel flattered.”

“Dr. McCracken is the greatest surgeon in Billington to-day. His operations and consultations keep him unusually busy until late at night. He is getting to be an old man now, and he feels that he ought to have an assistant to help shoulder some of his responsibilities.”

“And did he mention my name in regard to such a proposition?”

“Yes. That was principally his reason for coming to see me. He had heard somewhere that you were expected back from England shortly, and thought it best to broach the matter in time. Dr. McCracken, you know, has the confidence of thousands in and around Billington. He is a fine type of man—thoughtful, honest and sincere, and it is a splendid chance for you to swing into

the current of the best practice in Billington. What do you think of the proposition?"

"I think it is glorious. Who would ever have thought that I should be the recipient of such good fortune? It all seems like a dream!"

"Well, my boy, you lost a friend in Mrs. Atherton, but God, you see, has found you another."

"Did you say anything definitely to Dr. McCracken about the matter?"

"Yes, I went so far as to say that I thought you would probably accept his offer."

"Oh, I am so glad you told him. Then the position is open to me, and I am to be the assistant of the great surgeon!"

Charles' young face lit up with a smile. It was really the happiest moment in his life. He felt elated that Dr. McCracken should have thought of him. He had never anticipated such a surprise. He had left London in a somewhat discouraged state of mind, but now the clouds were breaking and he was the participant in a new, fresh dawning. He was to begin practice under the most auspicious circumstances. It spoke volumes for Dr. Mathers, and the people were pleased to know that the great surgeon had placed implicit confidence in the

young man. Everyone predicted smooth sailing for the latter. And they were not disappointed.

That very afternoon Charles called at Dr. McCracken's office and an agreement was drawn up and signed. Some days later the sign on the office door was changed. It now read—

DRS. McCracken & MATHERS  
Surgeons.

In a week Charles took charge of his new duties and began life's up-hill fight. He was most fortunate from the outset, had good success with his patients and in twelve months his name was on the lips of everyone. His rise was almost phenomenal. For the next five years he worked patiently and zealously with his senior partner, and, when the latter retired from active work, the whole practice fell into his hands and he was easily, though still quite young, the foremost surgeon in Billington.



## **Chapter XII.—The Picture on the Wall.**

Mrs. Atherton enjoyed the quiet life of Beresvale very much. To be sure, her thoughts often stole back to Billington to linger upon old scenes and old faces, but she was happy in her cottage up there on the hill. And it was a pretty place with its spruce trees, its bit of lawn and roomy garden. Nature had indeed lavished rare beauty upon the secluded spot.

Mrs. Atherton knew very few people in the village. When first she came among them she changed her name to Mrs. Vale, so that no one could identify her, and Mrs. Vale she remained unto the last. Everybody, however, looked upon the strange occupant of Ellen Allan's cottage with a certain air of suspicion. There was a mystery about it all they could not explain. The old gossips of the village were busy wagging their tongues for a long time. They came forward with new theories daily. Finally the talk dwindled down to almost nothing, and the mystery, surrounding the little woman on the hill, remained a mystery for a great many years in quiet Beresvale.

The few hundred dollars which Mrs. Ath-

"The Years between."

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erton had brought with her did not last very long. Soon the poor woman was forced to work for her daily bite of bread. But she was good in heart and soul and willing to suffer all for her Master's sake. She never despaired—never murmured. Ten long years had passed slowly in Beresvale, and these were the iron years of struggle that told heavily upon her. No one would have recognized the Mrs. Atherton of former days in the thin, stooped, sickly, white-haired, little woman on the hill. She was greatly changed. At times she would suffer the most violent headaches and cry out loud in pain, so that the little bird in the window would stop its song in sympathy. These headaches had come on slowly during the last two years, but they were gradually getting worse. While they lasted she would go for days without eating.

One night there was a rap at the kitchen door, and a poor beggar entered, hungry and dirt-bespattered. A cold wind was blowing up from the lakes, and the night was clear.

"I am cold, good woman, and very hungry," the sickly man cried out in suffering.

"Come—sit down over here!" Mrs. Atherton motioned to him, "the fire is a little low, but 'twill soon burn up, and then you will

get warm. I'll have something for you to eat in a few minutes."

Her last nickel had purchased the loaf of bread she held in her hands, but she whispered to herself: "Never mind, here's a poor fellow who is dying of hunger. I'll give him all I have. God will not let me starve. I'll only have to sew a little harder tomorrow—that's all!"

Mrs. Atherton did some sewing for one of the large linen factories in the village, and the money she earned with her needle was practically her only source of revenue.

The good woman busied herself, set the table, and in a few minutes the smell of fresh coffee stole through the room. She turned to wake the poor man who had fallen asleep in his chair. She touched his shoulder gently, and he whispered:

"What is it, good woman?"

"Come! I have a lunch for you."

"Lunch for me? Ah, how good of you! You do not know how I have suffered." And she wheeled his chair to the table.

When the meal was over he again seated himself before the fireplace, and for some time the two engaged in conversation.

"How did you happen to find the cottage?" Mrs. Atherton inquired, good-naturedly.

“Well, it was like this. I traveled many miles on foot to-day, started out at sunrise and reached Beresvale this evening. The steamer had just left the wharf, but I was fortunate enough to see a man canoeing across the lake. I called out loudly to him in the moonlight and begged him to take me across. He put me off at the landing and I stumbled along the road anxious to reach the village, but I could go no farther. Looking to the right of me I saw a light on the hill nearby—the only light visible anywhere—and thither I made my way. When I gained the top of the hill I saw the little cottage. There was nothing else to do, I was cold and hungry, so I rapped at the door and entered, glad as a child.”

“And you shall be very welcome to remain over night,” the woman said. Mrs. Atherton could tell that the man’s face betrayed no signs of wickedness.

Just then a fierce downpour of rain sounded outside. Flashes of lightning followed and very soon loud peals of thunder shook the earth.

“How glad I am to be here—out of the cold rain. Last night I slept in the open air, the earth for my pillow and the starry sky for my blanket. It was very cold.”

“May I ask you your name?” Mrs. Ather-

ton inquired kindly. "You have told me so many of your hardships I am anxious to know it."

"I am James Sykes from Billington, good lady."

A frightened look crept into the startled woman's face.

"James Sykes from Billington?" she repeated softly, pondering over the words. And instantly her thoughts stole back to Jonathan Sykes. Ah, yes. She knew the lad, but she must be very careful not to disclose her own identity.

"Yes, madam. My father at one time kept the largest bookstore there. Business reverses set in and we were turned out into the street. Father did not live very long to taste such misery, and mother soon followed his footsteps. An only child, I was now practically left alone. But a good friend was thrown across my way, and it was he who put me on my feet again. This is how it all happened. He was a doctor—"

"A doctor!" gasped Mrs. Atherton. Instantly her thoughts stole to Charles Mathers.

"Some two years ago, one May afternoon," the beggar continued, "I was walking down the street when I saw a runaway horse rushing furiously over the slippery

pavement. The occupant in the buggy seemed to have no control over the beast. A passing street car had frightened the horse. He jumped and jerked his head, the lines gave way—and he was off like a shot. When I turned he was only a block away, and it looked like a drive to death. My heart urged me to rush out and stop the beast. The river moaned at my very feet, and it was an easy matter for driver, buggy and horse to be dashed to pieces over the narrow embankment. The sound of hoofs grew louder and louder. Out I dashed into the open road. I threw my arm about the enraged beast's head. He dragged me a block, but I hung on with the strength of ten men. In a few minutes other men rushed out and came to my rescue."

"That was a close call, Mr. Sykes."

"Yes, driver and horse would have both been dashed into the river, had I not caught the horse by the head. And how grateful Dr. Mathers was!"

"Dr. Mathers?" repeated Mrs. Atherton, in great surprise.

The beggar turned and eyed her intently. He saw that she had been deeply interested in his story.

"Yes, the occupant of the buggy was no other than Dr. Charles Mathers—the re-

nowned Mathers of Billington, the great surgeon who daily saves the lives of many people."

"How long since all this happened?"

"Only two years ago."

"And is Dr. Mathers such a wonderful man there?"

"Yes, everybody loves him. He is very clever—and kindness itself."

Mrs. Atherton felt elated. She was pleased to hear that the world had been good to Charles, in all the long ten years since she had left Billington. In her heart she thanked God for having sent this beggar to her door that night to bring her this good news of her friend. It made her old heart feel young again to hear that he was not wanting in anything, and that he was great among the men of the city. Some day she would return to him—some day, when her thin, old hands were helpless and feeble. So long as they were able to stitch and stitch, she would feel content to remain at Beresvale. Should things come to the worst, a letter or telegram would reach Charles in Billington any time.

"Ah, yes," continued Sykes. "Dr. Mathers is a jewel of a man. He was so grateful to me for having saved his life. Of course I fractured the bones of my arm and leg in

the attempt, but he soon had me fixed up again at the hospital. From that day on I wanted for nothing. Dr. Mathers cared for me as a father. He interested himself in my behalf, and obtained for me a splendid position in one of the banks, but I could not stand prosperity. I grew wreckless. Drink was at the bottom of it all. One morning I went to my desk with the smell of liquor on my breath. An hour later the manager handed me a check and politely told me that my services were no longer required."

"Ah, that was too bad." The woman really pitied him. "But, then, drink has been the curse of many a one, and you should have known it."

"Yes, I should have known better. I left Billington that same evening. I was disgusted with myself. I should have gone to see my good friend, Dr. Mathers, but I was ashamed. I did not have the heart to face him and tell him the whole story."

"And you left Billington without seeing him?"

"Yes. I went to a neighboring town, secured employment, worked steadily a few weeks, but was soon told to go. It was drink again. And this is how I got down to my present low level. I now earn my living selling my little wares from door to door. I

could seek other employment, but I prefer this sort of a life to any other, because I have a desperate struggle to earn my daily bread, and it makes me more careful.”

“Have you heard of Dr. Mathers since you left Billington?”

“No, not a word. He does not know what happened to me, and I am satisfied. But he was very well when last I saw him. Only there is a sore spot in his heart somewhere. One day I called at his office. He looked very tired and worn out, told me he had not seen his bed for some nights. It was a beautiful afternoon. The breezes wandered noiselessly through the open window and left a refreshing coolness behind. For a long time Dr. Mathers gazed thoughtfully upon a picture of a middle-aged woman above the mantel piece on the opposite wall. He eyed the painting intently. His thoughts were evidently wandering through the flowery meadows of bygone days. Presently a large tear dropped from his eye, and I thought I heard it fall. It seemed to wake him from his musings and he turned to me, somewhat apologetically, and said: ‘Ah, Jim, forgive me! I forgot you were here. I was only thinking. That womanly face always makes me think. She was a second mother to me, but she left one day—oh, dear! it is ten



years ago—and I have searched for her in vain ever since. Some day I will tell you the whole story, and then you will not wonder that I grow thoughtful sometimes. But I never heard the closing chapters. I lost my position the next day, and you see I never went back.”

Mrs. Atherton turned about nervously in her chair. She felt like flying to Billington and clasping Charles to her heart. He evidently had not forgotten her. The more she thought of that picture on the wall and the beggar’s story, the more she felt inclined to leave Beresvale on the next train. But something held her back.”

“Not yet! not yet!” she whispered to herself. “I can still work.”

Now that she had heard definitely of Charles’ great success in life the poor woman felt more satisfied than ever, and the days passed quickly and pleasantly for her—but her health, alas! was failing fast.



### **Chapter XIII.—Dorothy Fairfax.**

Dorothy Fairfax, the accomplished daughter of Jerome Fairfax, banker, was the handsomest woman in all Billington. Her early days had been spent at the convent where the clever Notre Dames helped to develop her natural talents in music. She had a remarkable soprano voice for one so young. An only child, her parents naturally took great delight in her. At twenty she graduated, and for the two years following she took singing lessons from the best teachers Billington could afford. At this time also, she moved in the highest musical circles of her native city. Her father had always promised her a few years abroad to complete her musical education, and when she was twenty-two, she was sent to Europe. She remained one year at Paris and then took rooms in Leipzig.

Dorothy liked Leipzig immensely. She had come in contact with the best families during her two years' residence, and her heart felt very contented and happy in that luxurious, "in Bohemia", student-life. Her friends and companions were artists, musicians and writers who had come to Leipzig

to procure what was best in this center of culture and refinement. They frequently sat at the same dainty tables and sipped out of the quaint, china coffee-cups.

Dorothy occupied two pretty rooms on one of the leading streets of the German city and had for companion another Billington girl—one Bernice Chadwick. The latter was completing her studies on the piano. They had come to Europe together and they were going back home again. At school the two had always been good friends, but this novel experience abroad had drawn them together on terms of closer intimacy.

Dorothy had an attractive den. The walls were literally plastered with pictures of the old masters. On a divan in the corner were piled fully a dozen cushions. On the opposite side stood her piano, upon it a large marble bust of Liszt, gazing with dreamy, pathetic eyes about the little crowded room. And the sheets of music! There were piles of it scattered about on the floor, tables and chairs. Even the old piano's back was almost breaking with the weight of it. From an old-fashioned Venetian vase on the table a cluster of red and white roses sent their aroma through the room. Over the two doors, that led into a larger room, hung thin Japanese curtains. Bernice Chadwick's

rooms were on the same flat, but a few doors away.

It was a delightful June morning, one of those clear, refreshing mornings that make one feel it is good to be alive, when all one's cares and worries have wandered thousands of miles away and the heart knows nothing but gladness. Dorothy had just finished breakfast, and going over to her window, she opened it full length to let in the pleasant, morning air. Down in the streets a jolly mountaineer was singing a dainty, quaint, German love-song to the accompaniment of a mellow harp. The clear, liquid notes of his tenor voice floated into the morning air and filled every nook of Dorothy's room with sweet sounds—

“It was one Sunday bright and clear,  
The loveliest in all the year;  
We wandered through the golden grain,  
O'er blooming hill and grassy plain.  
The lark it sang; the sun it beamed;  
It's rays o'er mount and valley gleamed.  
O happy day, so sweet, so dear!  
Thou art so far, and yet so near—  
O happy day, so sweet, so dear!  
Thou art so far, and yet so near!”

The singer had a ringing voice, pleasant to listen to and far too good for the open

street. It was a voice that would have sounded well in a concert-hall, but one hears many such voices in the streets and in the haunts of the lowly. One seldom runs across a poor singer in Germany.

The little melody was soon over. Dorothy was delighted with it and threw down a piece of silver to the singer, who caught it eagerly in his hat and bowed gallantly.

A crowd of jolly students passed by, laughing loudly. In a few minutes the lectures at the university would begin, and the boys were hurrying to their tasks.

Dorothy stood a long time eyeing the changing scene in the street below. The sun shone full upon her, as she stood there, in the morning hour, her simple, white gown hanging loosely from her shoulders. She looked like a queen in contemplation, a look of intense joy upon her classical features. The sunbeams wandered through the meshes of her black hair, and, when she turned, one could see that she had a complexion of dazzling beauty, fair and creamy. Her cheeks were twin roses that never lost their color. Her eyes were dark brown and dancing, with long lashes, capable of changing with every thrill of emotion, and her lips were a brilliant red, hiding a fine set of pearly white teeth. Her every movement was grace-

ful; her head seemed fitted to wear a crown, her fingers to wield a sceptre, and yet, she had saint-like features that were full of sweetness and innocence.

Presently she was disturbed in her musings by Bernice's entrance into the room. The latter was a lively, jovial sort of a girl, and this time the small table in the middle of the room suffered. In an instant the Venetian vase and the red and white roses lay in a little river on the costly, Turkish rug, and, worst of all, Bernice herself was tied down to the floor, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry. Entering the room in her usual careless manner, she had stumbled over a small foot-stool—and that foot-stool was to blame for all the mischief.

"That horrid foot-stool will be the death of me yet," Bernice cried out hotly.

"Oh, my pretty vase and the roses—and the rug!" uttered Dorothy. "They are ruined. Dear me! the dear old vase Gretchen brought me from Venice smashed into a thousand pieces! Bernice, you are awful!" The last words were said with a certain degree of displeasure.

"Ah, never mind the Venetian vase. I'll get you another," interrupted Bernice with an air of suffering. "It's a pity that your— Oh! the pain! I wonder if I've broken any

bones!" The girl could not even then restrain her laughter and Dorothy herself joined in good naturedly.

"Come, Dorothy! What's the use of crying over spilt milk anyway? Come, give me your hand like a good girl and help me to my feet—or I'm dead, sure."

With Dorothy's assistance Bernice was helped to the divan in the corner. In an hour the latter was on her feet again as well as ever.

The morning mail brought several letters and papers for both of the girls. The content of that? She writes that she can hardly wait, tents, rest assured, were devoured eagerly.

"Mamma expects me home in a month from to-day, Bernice. What do you think of that? She writes she can hardly wait for the day."

"And so does mine. I also have a letter from her. She did not like the photograph I sent her at all. You know those we had taken in the coffee garden with Herr Kreisler one afternoon. She says I look just like a "Kaffee-klatsch", and I think probably she's right."

By this time Dorothy was reading the *Billington Post*, copies of which arrived in Leipzig every second Thursday.

"Say, Bernice, the *Post* is certainly giving

Dr. Mathers enough of advertising these days. Here is a whole column about him, saying how through an oil painting in an artist's studio he had at last come upon a path that would lead him to find an old friend of his—a Mrs. Atherton by name. The lady had disappeared from Billington under very suspicious circumstances many years ago. 'Tis interesting reading and you must see it. The paper is several months old. Mother must have sent it by mistake—but 'tis new to me."

"Do you know him, Dorothy?"

"No, I have never met him, but I have often passed him on the street. He is a fine man—a very clever surgeon, and awfully good, they say, to the poor."

"He is quite young as well, is he not?"

"I should judge him to be between thirty-five and forty."

"I don't remember ever seeing him," replied Bernice.

"Well, he is tall, has jet black hair, fair complexion and is clean shaven. He has what I would call a good, reliable, honest face for a man, and I think he is quite handsome. He dresses well and has always a very prepossessing appearance; he is broad-shouldered and well proportioned."

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"I suppose this fine-looking fellow is married as usual," exclaimed Bernice.

"Not by any means, Bernice. At least I have not heard so. Mother generally writes me all the news and I am sure she would not have forgotten to tell me this."

The clock on the mantel struck the hour of ten.

"Heavens! Bernice, time is flying," exclaimed Dorothy, as she jumped from her chair and grabbed her music. "Here I am supposed to be at the professor's studio at nine-thirty! Well, well! I'll get my scolding for keeping him waiting this morning. Besides, he is very busy to-day. He expected me early for a final rehearsal of the songs which I am to sing this evening at the recital. I suppose your piano solos will be perfectly done, you little imp!"

"Not by any means, Dorothy. When you are gone I shall get at them again. My fingers feel just like slate-pencils."

Dorothy donned her hat and passed through the door. In a minute she was back again.

"Oh, Bernice, I forgot to show you my graduation gown. The dressmaker sent it down last evening. It is a perfect gem. Oh, it is really gorgeous. I shall feel like the Queen of Sheba come to life again. It will

sparkle on the stage, I tell you, with its fifteen yards of gold lace and — But, oh, I must go away. I am forgetting the lesson, I'll show it to you when I return. Pray for me, Bernice! I am sure Herr Kreisler will kill me to-day."

Dorothy started down the steps. In ten minutes she stood at the singing-master's studio-door.



#### Chapter XIV.—The Singing-Master.

Herr Kreisler's studio was one of the loveliest and pleasantest spots in all Leipzig. It was an imposing little structure with a marble front, and comprised four rooms—the waiting room, studio proper, the concert-hall and the professor's private sanctum. On all sides of it there was a green stretch of lawn, upon which flowers bloomed all the summer long. Herr Kreisler was very proud of his flower-beds. He paid almost as much attention to them as to the voices of his singers.

When Dorothy reached the studio she was gasping for breath. She rang the door bell hastily, and presently the door opened, and a stout little man with long black hair and pleasant face appeared.

"**Guten Morgen, Fräulein!**" he greeted her tenderly.

"**Guten Morgen, Herr Professor!**" answered Dorothy in good German.

When she was seated in the waiting-room, Herr Kreisler noticed that she was short of breath and he exclaimed, somewhat angrily, as he threw his hands into the air: "**Mein Gott! Mein Gott!** Dorothy! How of'en have

I tole you not to run your feet off to get here. Now here you are again to-day, come for your last practice und you can't sing wort' anyt'ing. I know it. I feel it. Why, you're puffing worse den a beeg steam engine. **Ach!** How you expect to sing dose cadenzas is beyond de comprehension of mein brain. But you must sing dis very night. Not'ing vill help you. De programs are printed, de invitations have been sent out und all de beeg, fine folk of Leipzig vill be dere. Dey always come to Herr Kreisler's concerts. Dey like good music und singing."

Dorothy took his reproof very much to heart. He had never spoken to her in such certain tones before, but the poor man was so wrapped up in the young woman's success that he allowed himself to become unduly excited. She was without a doubt the most promising singer he had yet produced, and he wanted her to do herself and her teacher full justice in the concert-hall that evening.

"You see, professor," Dorothy remarked. "I was fully an hour late and I am to blame for it all. Bernice and I were chatting away and never thought of looking at the clock, when lo! it struck ten. So I grabbed my music and just hurried here as fast as I

could, because I was afraid you would scold me. But I can sing now. The little difficulty in breathing is gone."

"Come den, **mein kind**, und let's get to vork." And together the two wandered to the music room.

The studio was a large, well-lit, sunny room, plainly furnished but withal comfortable looking. It contained nothing but a piano, a table and two or three chairs. Artistic busts of Beethoven, Mozart and Schumann looked down peacefully from the snowy-white wall. The room contained but one picture. It was a fine steel etching of Franz Abt. There were no carpets, rugs, curtains or bric-a-brac. Upon the table stood a vase containing some flowers.

"Vat t'ink you of dese flowers, **mein Freund?**" spoke Herr Kreisler as he drew his pupil's attention to the choice red roses in the vase. "Aren't dey peutiful? I raise dem all by mein self."

"Yes. They are beauties. I think, professor, you might give me a few to wear this evening."

"**Ach, Gott! Fraulein!** You shall have dem. I shall pick dem fresh afterwards—also, a few for Bernice."

"But come und let's make us busy!"

Thereupon Herr Kreisler ran his nimble fingers through his long black hair and seated himself at the piano. Then his hands struck several heavy, deep-sounding, minor chords, and Dorothy walked over to his side.

“Vat vill you sing first — oratorio or opera?”

“Let it be ‘Faust’ first, professor!”

“Very well den, **Fräulein.**”

Dorothy’s arms fell to her side. She took a deep inspiration and her voice was ready to fall in presently with the singing-master’s accompaniment. The latter had almost finished playing the introduction, when there was a rap at the door of the music room.

“**Ach, ach; das ist doch ärgerlich!**” he exclaimed angrily, as he rose from the piano.

Mina, his wife, was at the door.

“Hans!” she exclaimed softly, “dere is a man in de waiting-room to see you und he is in a beeg hurry.”

“Vell! vell! he must wait until hes beeg hurry is passed by. I can’t see him for half hour yet. So, Mina, just tell him to wait leetle bit.”

“All right, Hans!”

“Vat does he look like?”

“Fine lookin’ man, so high, so beeg—nice

face. Wear new plug hat und long, gray overcoat."

"Has he a clean-shaven face?"

"Yes, Hans, he has."

"**Ach Himmel! Ach weiss wer er ist.** It is Signor Lamperti from England."

"Lamperti!" whispered Dorothy to herself, "the great Italian director?" The mention of him being so very near made her little heart jump.

"Vell, Mina, in half hour tell him I shall come." And the door closed with a bang.

Then the practice began in earnest. Dorothy was in fine voice. She sang her high notes with the greatest ease and had perfect control of her voice in the many intricate and difficult cadenzas that occurred in the text. At the evening concert she was to sing a bit of oratorio and opera and several songs in English, German and French. She knew them all perfectly, and, when the rehearsal was over, Herr Kreisler patted her on the shoulder, a look of intense satisfaction in his noble, teutonic face.

"**Ach Himmel, Fräulein!** You sang well—fine—excellent! Your voice just sounded like a bird—a nightingale—so clear, distinct und melodious. It carried mine soul into Heaven—away von dis noisy eart'. An angel could not have sung besser. Dorothy!

**mein Herz** feels very beeg about you and your charming voice. Pelieve me, you will yet make your fortune wid it. But soon—very soon—you vill go far away von Leipzig und den poor Kreisler vill never hear of hees singin' bird again. You know, **Fräulein**, dis poor old heart vill never cease remembering."

Just then a sad look crept into the singing-master's face, and for some minutes both were silent.

"So you are going to leave in two veeks. **Ach!** I don't like it at all—at all. De time vill be here already very soon. It makes me feel sick right here in mine inside chest."

"Yes professor, I too will benot be as unyou and Leipzig. But I will not be as ungrateful as you think me. You shall hear from me often."

"Vat do you intend to do ven you go home again?"

"Peel potatoes and scrub the floor occasionally, professor?"

"**Ach! ach, Himmel!**" he exclaimed, as his voice broke into a loud, penetrating laugh. "Peel potatoes! vell! vell!"

"No, professor, I was only fooling. Really, I have not yet settled upon any plans, but I am sure mother will keep me at home with her for sometime. Three years' absence is a



long time, and I am sure she is anxious to have me with her again. They write that the house has been dead since I left."

"But, **liebes Kind**, you must not neglect your singin'. You sing opera vell, und dat is where you pelong. Some day, pelieve me, you will be a great prima-donna."

"Prima-donna, professor?" Dorothy exclaimed in surprise. "Do you really mean it?"

"Why, surely, **Fräulein!**"

The thought of becoming a great prima-donna had never entered Dorothy's mind. She knew she sang well, but she was very humble in regard to her attainments. She had always planned a career on the stage. She loved to sing to that sea of humanity in front of her. There was something in it all that drew her heart like a magnet and held her fast. Often she woke at night and lo! the picture of faces rose before her — real, magnificent, and she saw herself in the role of Marguerite or Juliet, and heard the wild cries of applause that shook the very columns of the theater. And how that applause fed her hungry soul! But then, they were only dreams—mere idle dreams—strung together in feverish states of excitement and conjured up by some strange, idle fancy. In her heart the girl could not help feeling that

she was nursing a strange delusion. She would never be so fortunate as to have a chance of acquitting herself in grand opera. But, unsuspecting, innocent girl, she did not see the bright career the future had fashioned for her—out there, somewhere in the hours to come.

“**Ach!**” exclaimed the professor. “I forgot already so soon dat a gentleman is waiting for me in de reception room. So pardon me, **Fräulein**, for a few minutes! I vill go und see him und den ve vill go out together into de garden for de roses I promised you.” And the jolly old man bowed his way out of the music-room.

“**Ach! Signor Lamperti!**” he exclaimed, as he shook his old friend’s hand. “I am pleased to see you here again in Leipzig. You are lookin’ vell, Signor—getting younger every time I t’ink.”

Signor Lamperti came originally from Naples. He was a tall, splendid-looking fellow, and most of his time was spent in London, England, where he was very popular as a conductor. He spoke English faultlessly, only that his speech had a slight Italian accent, pleasant and musical.

“I see, Kreisler, you are still at the old trade,” Lamperti began, after indulging in

some preliminary conversation about the weather and kindred things.

"Ja! I have all I can do. By de way, one of my pupils gives her graduation recital dis evening at de concert-hall. I would be pleased to have you dere, signor."

"Thank you! I shall take advantage of the invitation. By the way, professor, pardon the impertinence, but who is the girl who has just finished singing in the music-room? She has a capital voice—sings like a lark. I could have listened to her for hours. Her operatic selections were especially cleverly done. You know the opera appeals to me above all else. She has the kind of voice one does not hear every day."

Lamperti's words filled the old teacher's heart with pride. To think that they came from the great Lamperti himself!

"De girl who has just finished her practice is Dorothy Fairfax—a Canadian. She leaves in two weeks for America. It is she whose graduation recital takes place dis night. Dis vas our last practice."

"Ah," interrupted Lamperti, "I shall go and hear her again, then. She's a bird I'd like to capture, Kreisler."

"**Ach**, signor, is dat so? Vell! vell!"

"Yes, Kreisler, I am looking up material for a new grand opera company. So far I

have selected all the principals except the prima-donna, and I believe I have come upon the proper person right here in your very studio. Yes, Miss Fairfax is the woman. Her voice is magnificent, voluminous—grand. She puts her whole soul into her singing."

Herr Kreisler was beyond himself. He had not expected such good luck.

"Is Miss Fairfax a young girl?"

"Yes, signor. She's about twenty-five."

"And handsome?"

"Very."

"Ah! I am sure she is just the person I have been looking for for months. Do you think I can see her?"

"Certainly. I shall go for her at once."

In a minute blushing, girlish Dorothy was face to face with the great Lamperti.

The interview lasted but thirty minutes. Lamperti told the singer how he had come to Leipzig looking for a prima-donna, how he had listened to her grand voice during the last half hour, and how greatly he was pleased with it.

"Would you like to go on the stage, Miss Fairfax?" he asked kindly.

"Very much, signor. My ambition has always been in that direction."

"Ah, I am glad to hear it. What about

signing a contract with me for six months grand opera? I understand your home is in Billington. Billington is on our circuit. We end the season there—remaining several weeks. So it will be very nice to appear in your native city. What do you say, Miss Fairfax?"

"Well, Signor, this is all so very sudden. I scarcely know what to say, and, besides, I do not know whether father or mother will consent to have me go on the stage. I am an only child, you know."

"But I will give you time to consider the matter, and, after you have talked it over with your parents on your return to Billington, then you can cable me your answer. Further instructions will follow."

Later that morning, as Herr Kreisler pressed a large bouquet of red roses into Dorothy's hands, he remarked heartily: "Take dem, you leetle voice o' heaven! Wear dem dis evening und sing—sing—sing like you never sang before, for Lamperti, de great Lamperti, vill be dere to listen. **Ach, mein Gott!** I'm so proud of you. **Mein** heart nearly preaks wid joy—and you're to be a great prima-donna. Well! well! **Fräulein**, I always tole you so."

The singing-master took her hand graciously as they parted at the garden gate.

“**Gott behüte Dich, Fräulein,**” was all he could say. His eyes were dimmed with tears.

When he entered the music-room, Mina, his wife, met him with a smile.

“Hans, vat’s de matter? Are you sick? Your eyes look just leetle bit red?”

“**Ach, Mina,** I feel bad. I know I shall miss Dorothy und her fine voice in de music-room after dis!”

And the poor old singing-master really meant it.

He loved his work and more—he loved his pupils, and Dorothy Fairfax had a special little corner in his affections.

The recital that evening was a great triumph for the young singer. Signor Lamperti was more than pleased with his new choice and left Leipzig congratulating himself upon the treasure he had discovered so fortunately.

One month later Dorothy arrived in Billington. The very first evening at home a long discussion took place between Dorothy and her father and mother. It was a case of two to one, but Dorothy won easily, and the following day a cablegram went flying to England, addressed to Signor Lamperti. It was composed of only a few words, and read:—

“Will sign contract for six months tour grand opera.”

Dorothy Fairfax.”

Several months later the young singer joined the other members of the company.



## Chapter XV.—In Thady's Studio.

The heat of summer was intense and crowds were leaving Billington for the seashore. Dr. Mathers also wished for a holiday. He longed to get away from work, from his office, from the hospital—from everybody. Overwork and his many daily operations had unnerved him, and he needed rest badly. And where do you think he went to recuperate? It was to Stanford that his heart had so often turned during the past weeks, and to Stanford he went, now that there was a short holiday in store for him. And he was glad to return again to the home of his childhood. It had been a long time since last he had seen the place. Imagine then the pleasure such a visit would afford him.

Dr. Mathers found that Stanford had changed very little. It was practically the same Stanford he had known in his boyhood—the same, little, busy place of factories and mills. His father's old mills were still hives of industry, sending their smoke into the air. His home, too, recalled many memories, whenever he chanced to pass it, but, now that his mother was gone, he did not care

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to enter it. Father Flynn's rose-garden was just as beautiful as ever. Hundreds of roses wafted their perfume into the air, but the gentle Curé, who had tended the precious blooms so faithfully, had answered the call of the Master and passed into fairer regions. He visited his mother's grave—only once. It made him feel so sick at heart that he did not think it wise to go again.

Long before Charles ever thought of visiting Stanford, he had heard great and wonderful things about that first chum of his childhood—the cripple, Thady Charlton. He had sent him regular letters in the days gone by, and thus the old friendship thrived and grew stronger. In his young days Thady had always given evidence of fine, artistic taste. When a mere child, he was always busy with his miniature set of paints, and, as he grew older, his love for painting waxed stronger. Then he became a cripple, which forced him to remain indoors more than ever. Other boys played and romped about the streets, but Thady sat at home before his easel painting wonderful pictures. He loved nature—the sun and star-kissed skies, the flashing rivers and lakes, the grand old mountains, the green grass carpets, the gorgeous flowers and lordly trees; the white dawns, the warm noons, the crim-

son dusks and lone, moonlit nights. He loved the animals of the earth, and the men and women and children who looked up to God in trust. He had a poet's pure soul, and he depicted the poetry of life on canvas—real, natural, convincing. He never painted a picture of earth without bringing in sun or moon-illuminated skies, and he never made a friend without bringing heaven very near to his heart. Though crippled for life, he never murmured, never complained. His mind had an optimistic turn, and his canvases as well, for he always viewed life through rosy glasses.

In time he drifted to Europe, where he spent two years amid the great art galleries and studying under the best masters. Then he returned to Stanford. In a short time his pictures commanded high prices, and he became famous.

Dr. Mathers had been in Stanford only a few minutes, when he stood before Thady Charlton's studio-door. He gave a slight rap, and in an instant the door was opened by a rather sweet-faced girl of twenty—one of the artist's models.

"Good-day, sir!" she remarked, somewhat brusquely.

"Is Mr. Charlton in?" asked Dr. Mathers in a low voice.

"Yes, sir," came the answer like a shot.  
"Your card, please!"

Charles handed her his card and she disappeared behind the heavy cloth curtains.

In an instant she returned.

"Mr. Charlton will see you in his studio in a few minutes."

"Thank you!"

Five minutes later Charles was ushered into Thady's work-shop. Thady sat at his easel, and, when Charles entered, he threw down brush and palette and exclaimed in wild excitement: "Ach, Charles, I am so glad to see you. Come, sit down beside me so I can get a good look at you! How you have grown—so strong and robust, and quite good-looking, too, old boy, eh? Believe me, I would never have known you."

Thady, too, had changed since last they had met, and, as he sat there in his long, gray gown, he looked like a poet in contemplation. He was very tall and thin, but he had a kindly face with dancing, brown eyes and heavy black eye-lashes. He wore his hair long. It touched his shoulders.

For some time the two friends recalled old scenes and faces in and about Stanford.

Then they recounted their various experiences abroad, and frequently loud peals or laughter floated through the room.

"You see, Charles, I am still helpless. My legs refuse to do their work. While in Europe, I consulted a number of eminent physicians and surgeons, but they all told me the same story. They could not relieve me in any way. So I am content and make the best of it. My crutches are all in all to me now. I could not do without them."

"You are very sensible, Thady. What is the use of worrying and fretting and storming against a barrier that God has placed in your way for some purpose? Perhaps if it were not for this affliction, you would not be the great artist you are to-day. There is always a compensation somewhere, Thady."

"Great artist, did you say? Well! well!" And Thady laughed like a school boy.

"Yes, Thady. For a long time I have been reading wonderful things about you in the papers. Only a few days ago, I saw somewhere that one of your pictures won a prize at one of the great art exhibits in London, England."

"Ah, yes, it was my canvas, Where Sky and Land Meet—a delicious bit of coloring that pleased me immensely. I was just putting the finishing touches to this picture here, when you entered. In two weeks I

ship it to Paris, where I hope it will win a prize."

Charles' eyes stole to the picture on the easel. It was a landscape — rivers and mountains and trees bathed in twilight-glory.

"It is very beautiful," the doctor remarked, as his eyes drank in the wondrous glory of those crimson skies. "It is not a scene in Stanford, Thady, is it? It does not seem familiar to me."

"No, but it is not very far away—only a few miles down the river."

"Then you go elsewhere for fresh ideas."

"Stanford offers nothing new to me now. I have sketched and painted all her delightful haunts, and my soul longs continually for new material. I journey to places where nature wears a different look. But come, Charles, let me show you some of my work! Kindly hand me the crutches, there in the corner."

Charles did as he was told, and, as the artist rose from his chair, a feeling of suffering stole into the doctor's responsive heart. "He will never gain the use of those limbs, poor fellow!" he whispered to himself as Thady led the way to his large gallery of pictures.

It was a beautiful place to linger in—this wonderful room of studies, sketches and pictures.

“Most of these are sold,” Thady remarked as the two entered the room. “I always ship them in lots to the art stores abroad. I am sure you will recognize some of the scenes and characters I have portrayed here in Stanford.”

The first picture they came upon was a narrow street scene in Stanford, just as evening was setting in.

Charles gave a cry of delight as he recognized the old familiar street.

“That’s Mott street, isn’t it, Thady? Why, there’s the old Italian—let me see, what was his name? Oh, yes, Cellini. Any one would know him standing at the door of his old fruit-store,” remarked Charles.

They moved to the next picture. An old man, bent in years, was selling papers at a street corner in the glare of an electric light.

“Ah! there’s old Tim Slade brought back to life again,” joyously exclaimed the doctor. “Really, Thady, I can hear him now calling—‘Ev’nin’ News, Star—Tel’gram! las’ edition!’ What has become of him, Thady?”

“He sold papers for many years at the street corner and, when he grew older, deafness came upon him. One day—it was just

when spring was setting in—a street car knocked him down and they carried him to the hospital. He had not heard the motor-man's bell. That evening the papers were full of Tim Slade. You know, Charles, he was a precious soul. Everybody loved him, even though he walked the paths of the lowly."

"Did he die soon after his injury?"

"No. He lived a few days and, sometime after he was buried, we only found out that he had managed to save a goodly fortune in the years that had been given him."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. He bequeathed five thousand dollars to the city to found a home for orphan newsboys."

"How good of him! But then, he was always the father of them all."

"Some of Stanford's most prominent business men to-day, Charles, were newsboys at one time, who often felt the sheltering wing of Tim's kindness."

Another picture that caught Charles' eyes was a garden of roses, in one corner of which an old gray-haired priest sat, breviary in hand, lost in contemplation. It was no other than Father Flynn.

"Thady, this is by far the prettiest thing I have yet seen. Is it sold?"

“No, not yet.”

“Then I shall buy it.”

“You may have it, Charles. I shall make you a present of it. I know Father Flynn was a great friend of yours, and this picture will mean a great deal to you.”

The two friends were now gazing at the most valuable picture in the gallery. Presently they came upon another landscape on a somewhat larger scale. It represented a little cottage on a hill with pine-trees in front of it and a neglected garden behind. The face of a woman was visible over the rain-washed fence.

“Great Heavens! where have I seen that face before?” exclaimed Charles almost wildly as his eyes stole over the canvas. “It is so familiar. Let me see, who can it be?”

His head sank into his hands and for a moment he stared to the floor, wrapped in deep thought.

“Surely, you do not know her, Charles?” interrupted Thady. “She is not a Stanford woman.”

“Yes, I do know her. I have it now,” he exclaimed. “It’s the face of Mrs. Atherton, a little thin perhaps, but the same eyes, the same expression. Where is she, Thady? tell me and speak quickly! I have looked for her all these years.”



Charles did not know what he was saying. His mind was agitated and he was so overcome with surprise that he could have cried for very joy.

"I do not know who the woman is Charles," Thady interrupted. "I could not tell you her name. She never told me, but I painted that picture at—at—let me see what's the name again—yes——Beresvale."

"Beresvale?" whispered Charles. "Ah yes, I know the place, but go on with your story!"

"Well, I journeyed to Beresvale for the summer. That was five years ago. I went there to sketch principally. Beresvale, you know, is a paradise for an artist. One day I climbed a steep hill. 'Twas hard work, but I wanted to get a glimpse of the little village in the valley, and, when I reached the top, the scene you see depicted on that canvas greeted my eyes. My fingers fairly ached to paint the picture, and my heart as well. So I set to work. The lady you see looking over the fence was the only occupant of the house, and I gave her a couple of dollars for standing in that spot until I had painted her. She was poorly clad—looked sickly, and I am sure the money came to her at a very opportune time "

"The poor woman!" uttered Charles. I am sure it is Mrs. Atherton. She has felt the bitter sting of poverty. Did she speak to you at all, Thady?"

"Just a little. She told me she was not well and that she suffered great pain."

"But that was five years ago, Thady, was it not? I am sure she is dead then by this time," sadly exclaimed Charles. "Do you know I feel positive that the woman is Mrs. Atherton. There can be no mistake as to her identity. Her face is stamped indelibly upon my memory. I knew that woman very well once upon a time, but one day she drifted away. That was many years ago, and up to the present I have not been able to find her. I have searched for her all this time and had almost given up forever. Believe me, dear Thady, the memory of it all is the one great, arid desert in my life."

Then Charles related briefly how Mrs. Atherton had brought sunshine into his life.

"So you knew the woman who posed for me," Thady remarked when the little story was finished. "It all seems like a dream to me. I am sure you will want that picture now as a companion to The Rose Garden."

"I would give all I possess to own it, for I feel that through it I have been led to the discovery of this noble friend of mine."

"It all seems very strange to me indeed. But that picture shall be yours. Let me hope that it will help you to find your friend!"

"Thanks, Thady. I shall repay you for all of this some day. Oh, I am so glad I came to Stanford. I little dreamed that I would be the recipient of so pleasant a surprise."

"Nor did I," interposed the artist. "I suppose you will now dispatch yourself post-haste to Beresvale."

"Yes. There's no time to be lost. I shall leave on the evening train. If Mrs. Atherton is still in that cottage on the hill, I mean to take her back to Billington with me to spend her remaining days in peace and quiet."



## CHAPTER XVI.—The Cottage on the Hill.

When the train pulled into Beresvale Dr. Mathers could hardly contain himself for joy. His heart beat violently and sent the blood tingling through his muscles. At last! at last! he thought the mystery would be unraveled. Mrs. Atherton would stand before his very eyes and tell him all. Then he would fly back to Billington with her and try to make her comfortable and happy. It was a debt he owed her. He knew he could never repay her for all that she had done lead for him. For days and nights, through long, bitter years, he had thought of her — the great benefactress of his life — and now, at last, he was to come to her in time of plenty, come to her own little cottage in its sweet solitude there on the hill and reclaim her as his very own. It was only last night, waking in his sleep, he had heard her calling for help. Then the vision floated past his eyes, and there, in the moonlight she stood—a weak, stooped little body bowed with suffering and anguish. A shudder passed over him and he brushed the picture from his eyes instantly. Then his senses argued it was only a picture of his own

irritable, excited imagination, and slowly and quietly he drifted to sleep.

As Charles walked up the narrow path that led to the cottage, God alone knew what his thoughts were. A cool breeze swept lazily through the stately pine trees, and on the green grass the shadows nested in the warmth of the quickening, morning sunshine. Volumes of delicious bird music floated from the bushes and trees around. On the cottage door-step an old crow sat cawing to its mate. It was the only solitary note in the beautiful *Lorelei*, that bird and wind drew out of the harp-strings of the glorious morning.

Slowly he mounted the steps that led to the cottage-door. His heart fairly sank within him as he rapped gently. He expected to see Mrs. Atherton open the door. One minute passed—two—five! Again he knocked, but still no answer. He waited and knocked again. A passing breeze wandered over the grass. He heard its light footsteps. For a second it seemed to pause and listen for the sound of human voice. Then it sighed and crept away stealthily into the deep valley below.

Charles' eyes wandered to the two front windows. The curtains were closely drawn. Then he walked to the side of the house and

entered. The door stood wide open—an invitation that Charles could not well refuse just then. He went from room to room calling out loudly, almost wildly: "Mrs. Atherton! Mrs. Atherton!" But his footsteps on the creaking floor alone made answer. The curtains were drawn in every room. Not even a ray of sunshine pierced the strange quiet of the little cottage. In the kitchen the cooking utensils lay about as if the evening meal had just been completed. On the table a lamp stood drained to the last drop. Dr. Mathers examined closely everything in the rooms, but nothing brought him any light as to the strange occupant of the little cottage. He wandered out into the neglected garden, where the dawns and noons and nights lingered in succession all the year round, and, placing his hand to his mouth, called loudly: "Mrs. Atherton! Mrs. Atherton!" But the echo came back from the valley below fainter and dimmer. That sighing voice from the valley seemed to mock him—yea, laugh at him, and he did not like the sound of it. It irritated him and for the moment he wished himself thousands of miles from Beresvale. He called again and placed his hands to his ears to shut out the echo that was sure to follow from the valley below. Then he retraced his steps to the

cottage, entered it, and returned again in a minute. For some time he made a thorough search of the grounds but to no avail. He had failed to find any living being on the place. Then he left, heavy at heart and disappointed, and slowly threaded his way down the green grassy hill. When he reached the bottom he followed a little path on the edge of the river to its destination. It brought him face to face with a blacksmith shop. The forge and anvil kept a number of men busy, and outside a half dozen horses awaited their turn to be shod.

Charles entered the smithy and, uttering a cheery good-morning, remarked with an air of simplicity: "Gentlemen, is the proprietor of the smithy amongst you?"

"Yes, sir!" came the loud answer from Abe Murray as he stepped out from in under the horse he was shoeing.

Charles walked over to him, asking softly: —

"Could you spare a few minutes, sir?"

"Certainly," Abe answered carelessly as he lifted his pipe from the corner of his mouth, "the horses can wait awhile."

Thereupon the two walked back to the smithy door.

"I am Dr. Mathers from Billington," Charles remarked. "Here's my card."

"Dr. Mathers from Billington—the great surgeon—shaking hands with a poor fellow of a blacksmith! Well! well!" Abe exclaimed. Then he turned and whispered to the other men in the shop: "It's Dr. Mathers come to town—just think of it! Take a good look at him, boys!"

Charles overheard this remark and could have smiled at the old blacksmith's sincerity. The latter, however, continued as he faced him again: "I am Abe Murray of Beresvale—blacksmith, but always plain Abe, sir. Ain't I, boys? But, doctor, what brings you to Beresvale, may I ask?" inquisitively remarked sturdy Abe. "Surely you have not come to take the rheumatics out of poor Bill O'Loane's legs or the yellow janders out of old Phil Huston's system. Both have been bed-ridden many a day."

"No, no. I came on an altogether different errand. I am looking for a Mrs. Atherton whom I am told lives in the cottage on yonder hill."

"A Mrs. ——— who, did you say?"

"A Mrs. Atherton, sir."

"I never heard the name. Did you, boys?" and he turned questioning the other men who had in the meantime gathered around.

"No," came their answer promptly.

"The Years between."



"A Mrs. Vale has resided in yonder cottage this long time," began Abe. Charles drew back, greatly surprised. Then it was not Mrs. Atherton after all, he thought. But the woman on Thady's painting was the image of her. No one would have disputed that fact. There was the same garden, the same cottage, the same pine-trees. But might it not have been a mere coincidence after all?

"Did you say her name was Vale?" questioned Charles, eagerly.

"Yes, she always signed it so. But she was a strange character. She would do such funny things, and nobody knew the reason. She never mixed up with the villagers at all, but when they called to see her, she was always very gracious and kind."

"Has she always lived here?" Charles asked quickly.

"No. She came here quite a number of years ago—just a few weeks before Ellen Allan died. She nursed poor Ellen through her sickness and the woman, in gratitude, bequeathed to her the cottage and her other earthly belongings".

"Was she a relative of the woman who died?"

"I cannot answer that question. No one ever seemed to know who she was or where she came from. The majority, however, be-

lieved she was Ellen's aunt come out from England to live with her. Were you up at the cottage?"

"Yes, I just came from there."

"And did you see Mrs. Vale?"

"I could not find a soul in the place. I searched the house through and through and the garden and grounds as well. In the kitchen the dishes stood as if the evening meal was just over, and on the table I found a lamp with the last drop of oil burned out. It all looked to me as if the house had been vacated some time in the evening."

"Ah, I see. It is all clear to me now. I'm sure Mrs. Vale has one of her spells on."

"One of her spells did you say? What do you mean?"

"Well, for months past she seems to wander a kind of in her mind and she walks away from home, they say, not knowing whither she is going. Those who have seen her say she looks very thin and that she talks little. They have even heard her mumbling strange sounding words to herself. In fact, they think she's not all there—but she's a harmless body. I'm sure, doctor, she's wandered of again somewhere—the poor woman! 'Twill be the death of her yet one of these days."

"I am beginning to feel now, Mr. Murray, that this is not the woman I am looking for," Charles said at last, after the last flickering hope had gone. "The woman I am looking for is Mrs. Atherton, and you say the occupant of yonder cottage is a Mrs. Vale—two different persons altogether—different names, you see. I think the best thing I can do is to go back to Billington and give up the chase forever. I know I shall never have the heart to take it up again."

"Perhaps some of the people in the village can give you more satisfactory information, doctor."

"Thanks, Mr. Murray. I shall go and see some of them before leaving." And he did. But the same story came to him everywhere. Nobody had ever heard of Mrs. Atherton in Beresvale. There was a mistake somewhere. Mrs. Vale had come to nurse her niece, they said, and after Ellen Allan's death, had always resided on the hill.



## CHAPTER XVII.—Mrs. Atherton.

That evening as Dr. Mathers' train pulled out of Beresvale, a woman was seen in the moonlight making her way up the lonely hill that hung over the quiet village. Her face bore deep lines of suffering, and her hair was snowy white. It was no other than Mrs. Atherton—known to the villagers as Mrs. Vale—returning home after a two-days' absence. The thin, pale face of the unfortunate woman looked ghastly in the moonlight. The Angel of Pain had often visited it and left upon it deep lines which the years could not efface.

When the sick woman reached the top of the hill, she was almost overcome with exhaustion and she sank upon an old bench nearby and, placing her head in her hands, cried out loudly to the lonely night around her. "O God! my head—my head! The pain will yet set me crazy. Where have I been? Where am I now? What has happened?" She seemed dazed, just waking out of a stupor. It was all like a dream she could not recall.

Old Abe Murray was right. Mrs. Vale had had one of her spells. She had left the cottage two nights before and had walked

along the edge of the river in her mental excitement, until she had reached the forest. And here, she had remained for nearly two days until a faint glimmer of reason shone again over all the vague, strange, incoherent imaginings of her diseased mind.

Having rested, she rose and made her way to the cottage on the hill. Within, it was dark and cold. No lamp glittered, no fire burned, and she was hungry. The poor woman held her head tightly in her hands and cried out in suffering.

A year and a half passed. Mrs. Atherton's mental condition was growing rapidly worse. One day she suffered a severe attack, and almost instantly her mind became a blank. She wanted to get away from Beresvale. Voices were calling her everywhere; spirits were driving her out with terrible oaths, she said. She wanted to get away. If she stayed at Beresvale much longer she would meet certain death. Gloomy thoughts haunted her continually. They were the productions of a diseased mind. Early one morning while in the throes of wild excitement, she quit her bed, dressed hurriedly, threw a yellow shawl about her and made her escape just as fast as her feet could carry her.

One hour later she reached the depot, but

she did not seem to recognize her surroundings. The early morning train was just pulling in. Hurriedly she entered one of the passenger coaches. The next moment she was being carried miles and miles from Beresvale.

The train did not stop at any of the small stations on the way. Billington was the first stopping-place for it was a through train. The conductor cried at the top of his voice: "All change cars at Billington!" His strong voice seemed to arouse Mrs. Atherton out of her lethargy. Her eyes opened a little and she rose and went to the door with the other passengers and made good her escape. But she did not understand.

When she stepped into the streets of Billington her mind was again lashed with heavy hurricanes of thought, and she went groping through the snow and wind that winter night—ignorant of her surroundings, dazed, confounded. She walked on hurriedly for a few steps. A hundred demons seemed to be pursuing her. The wind fairly whistled through the empty trees. For a moment she paused and seemed to listen for the sound of voices. Then, pulling her thin yellow shawl about her, she disappeared in the darkness.

Poor Mrs. Atherton, if Charles but knew!

## CHAPTER XVIII.—An Unexpected Meeting.

“Mother, how do you like my hair a la **pompadour**?” spoke Dorothy Fairfax as she entered her mother’s drawing room. “Does it become me, do you think?” she questioned with just a little touch of vanity.

“Yes, child. I think you look just lovely,” answered her mother, a kindly, queenly woman of about fifty, as her eyes wandered from the book on her lap to the beautiful figure of her daughter in the curtained door-way. “Really, Dorothy, I do not know what I shall do in the theater this evening. It will seem so strange to see you parading there on the stage before thousands—but ah! **l’enfant adorable**, I am proud of you to say the least. I wonder if you will seem ‘my Dorothy’, when I see you decked in rare laces and fine diamonds. Child, I never expected to see you in all this glitter and shine, but my heart’s at rest, when I know that you’re a good girl. And it’s easy to be that, Dorothy, when one’s thoughts never wander from the path that leads into the Heart of God.”

Dorothy had returned to Billington only

a few days previously. Signor Lamperti's company was billed for a two weeks' engagement—the last of the season. The girl was the picture of loveliness as she strode over to her mother in her rich, silken gown.

"Ah, little mother mine!" she said lovingly as she placed her arms about her neck gracefully, "you must not worry about me. I will never be anything but a credit to you and father. But I love the stage—that sweeping sea of faces, the anxious looks, the smiles and tears, the thunders of applause. Ah! 'Tis glorious, mother—glorious!"

"Dorothy, I have not felt well since you returned from England."

"Why, what has happened, mother?"

"I don't like to tell you, child. I fear what I will say will hurt you."

Dorothy sank upon her knees and looked straight into her mother's anxious eyes.

"But you must tell me, mother—you must!"

There was silence for a few minutes. Dorothy stared into her mother's eyes, and slowly she drew the secret from her lips.

"Dorothy," Mrs. Fairfax began, "I am glad to see you happy, but you do not know how I have missed you since you left to fill your various engagements with Signor Lam-



perti's company. When you wrote from Leipzig that you were coming home, ah, child, I was happy. I felt that you would remain with me always, but you stayed only a short time and then you went away again. Oh, I grew so lonely. Many a night I woke and wondered where my Dorothy was. Then I saw your face before the foot-lights, and I felt like rushing onto the stage and snatching you in my arms and carrying you back to Billington. I was really very lonely although I never mentioned it in my letters."

"That was too bad, mother, but just think of it, I am home now, and perhaps I shall never have the chance to appear in grand opera again. But Signor Lamperti told me the other day he was pleased with my work all season—and then, mother, you know what the papers said about me. Did you receive the clippings I sent you daily and the letters?"

"Yes, Dorothy. You were a good child to write so often. Your father and I read all your lines together, and they always brought you very near home."

"Every night when the performance was over, mother, I rushed to my dressing-room, and a letter went speeding to you some ten minutes later. It was short sometimes, but sincere, nevertheless. It seems strange that

I should sing to the Billington people to-night, and I really feel just a little nervous. I am afraid I'll have a very critical audience too. Oh mother! I hope I will do well!"

"Never mind, Dorothy, I am sure you will. I am so glad 'Faust' is the opening bill. Your 'Marguerite' seems to have evoked splendid criticisms everywhere."

Presently the door opened and Mr. Fairfax entered with the day's mail under his arm.

"Hello, father!" the girl cried lovingly as she ran over and embraced him.

"Hello, sweet! You look so different this afternoon. What's the matter?"

Dorothy's eyes met her mother's and both laughed loudly.

"Well really, for the life of me, Dorothy," the father continued, "there is something about you that isn't all right, and I don't know what it is."

"Look again sharply, father."

"Ah, yes. I see now," he answered somewhat slowly. "Your hair is done up strangely."

"Strangely, father? Why no! beautifully—that's a better word. Mother's just been in raptures over it, and I am quite proud of its *a la pompadour* twist as well."

“**A la** what? Well! well!” laughed her father. “Is this some new continental fad, Dorothy?”

“Yes, father—Parisian.”

“Well I don’t like this **a la pompadour** business at all.”

“Perhaps you will like the braids better then. To-night you will see me with two pig-tails dangling down my back tied with blue ribbon.”

“So you are one of those blue-ribbon Marguerites. Really I never saw a Marguerite that didn’t have a blue ribbon in her hair. By the way, Dorothy, whom do you think I met just a few minutes ago?”

“I have no idea, father.”

“Well, it was your old nurse, Mary Carroll.”

“Goodness! Is she still alive? She must be eighty.”

“Eighty-two, and just as sprightly as ever.”

“Is it possible?”

“Well, she hurried over to me just as I was turning the corner. ‘I see by the papers that Dorothy has become a great lady,’ she said to me, ‘and she’s to sing here to-night they tell me. Ah, bless your old heart! it’s a proud man you must be this night to know that your daughter’s become a great singer

like Patti and Albani, and, to be sure, it's glad I'd be to have a seat near the lights to hear her sing, but I can't afford it. A dollar's a whole heap to give away when you haven't got it, but oh! I'd like to hear the dear child sing.' 'Would you really like to hear Dorothy sing, Mrs. Carroll,' I questioned, and she nodded her head. 'Well, you shall', I answered. 'I shall send you some tickets after tea.' She thanked me kindly and, pressing my hand, remarked: 'I always thought Dorothy would become a great singer. When she was but a babe in her mother's arms, no matter when she cried, there was always a good bit of music in her voice.' So Dorothy, I'm going to send over tickets for Mary and Michael after tea. The maid will take them over."

"But why should Bridget take them over, father? I will go myself. It is only four o'clock. Where does she live?"

"In the same old cottage, two blocks from here."

"Then I will go at once. Poor Mrs. Carroll, I am sure, will be glad to see me," and she hurried to her room and in a few minutes was dressed and out in the street making her way to the Carroll home.

Mrs. Carroll recognized her at once and threw her thin trembling arms about her.

"Ah, my dear child!" she exclaimed. "Tis glad I am to see you. You're such a big—such a great lady now, Dorothy, I thought you would really be too proud to call on us poor people, but I see your heart's still in the right spot, lassie. Come and be seated, child!"

"No, Mrs. Carroll—not to-day. I only thought I would run in and see you for a minute and bring you the tickets for this evening's concert."

"Ah, 'tis very good of you, indeed. I'm afraid, however, I won't be able to go after all."

"But father said—"

"Yes, Dorothy," interrupted the little gray-haired woman, "when I met your father I could see nothing in the way of my going, but just think of it, when I came home, I found Mike lying on the bed, moaning dreadfully. Several men stood around him. He had fallen on the hard pavement, and I am afraid he has broken a bone for he is crying terribly with pain."

"I feel so sorry, Mrs. Carroll," Dorothy said tenderly. "The poor man! Have you sent for a doctor?"

"Oh, yes. When I reached home one of the men rushed down street for Dr. Mathers. He is upstairs now."

"Dr. Mathers?" Dorothy whispered to herself. "I must be going, Mrs. Carroll," she continued. "Let me hope that your husband's fall will not lead to anything serious."

"Oh, Dorothy, do not leave so quickly. You must see Mike. I am sure he'd never forgive me for not bringing you up to see him."

"But the doctor—" interrupted Dorothy.

"Never mind him. Sure, I knew him when he stayed with Mrs. Atherton."

"Mrs. Atherton? Ah yes, that is the woman Dr. Mathers has been looking for all these years, is it not?"

"Yes, child. She was a second mother to him and she was always so kind to me and Mike."

"Did not the doctor find her?" asked Dorothy inquisitively.

"No. He gave up the search some months ago. He now thinks her dead."

"But what about that painting in an artist's studio the papers discussed so?"

"Ah, that only kindled new hopes for a short time. It was found that the woman in the picture was a different person altogether. But come along, Dorothy! Let's go upstairs to Mike, and then I'll introduce you to the doctor as well."

Presently Dorothy entered the quaint

little bed-room. The poor, old man smiled as she entered.

"Mr. Carroll, I am sure, does not remember me," Dorothy began, nervously.

"Ah yes, I do. To be sure—why it's Dorothy Fairfax, the great singer, come to see us," and he stretched out his trembling hands to greet her.

Just then Dr. Mathers' eyes wandered to the prima donna. He had recognized her face from the posters on the advertising boards.

"Dorothy, shake hands with Dr. Mathers!" said Mrs. Carroll, good-naturedly.

Dr. Mathers stepped forward graciously and took her hand, saying pleasantly: "I am delighted to meet you, Miss Fairfax." And he really meant it for he could not remember when he had seen so handsome a woman.

"This is the great singer, doctor, who sings grand opera to-night—a girl born and bred right here in Billington. When she was a baby," Mrs. Carroll continued, "I held her in my arms many a time, and for years and years I loved her and saw her grow into womanhood."

A slight blush stole into Dorothy's cheeks. She cast a searching glance at the doctor.

Their eyes met for a moment, and a pleasant smile came to his face.

"I am sure you are pleased to be home again, Miss Fairfax," he said good-naturedly, "and I know that a large audience will greet you this evening. I seldom go to the theater—time is precious you know, but I try never to miss an evening of grand opera. I think it is all so delightful—the gorgeous costumes and shining lights, the stirring choruses and artistic solos. I am passionately fond of 'Faust' to say the least. Gounod has invested Goethe's words with charming melodies."

"I hope you will not be disappointed then this evening, doctor," Dorothy answered shyly. "I know it will be very trying for me to appear before a Billington audience."

"You know, Mike," interrupted Mrs. Carroll as she folded her hands in her gingham apron, "Dorothy has been good enough to bring us two tickets for the concert, but I'm afraid we will not be able to use them. You are sick in bed and I—I cannot leave you."

"You may go so far as I am concerned," said the injured man.

"Are any bones broken?" Dorothy kindly asked the doctor.

"No," answered the surgeon. "I find it is only a bad sprain."

"The Years between."

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"Then it is nothing very serious," continued Dorothy.

"No, nothing alarming at all, only that the condition is quite painful," answered Dr. Mathers.

"Then, I am sure Mrs. Carroll at least will be able to attend the opera. I shall send Bridget over to keep Mr. Carroll company."

"And Bridget will be first class company, Dorothy," chimed in old Carroll. "If a man was to die, her cheery voice would really keep him from falling into that long, eternal sleep. It is such a pleasure to listen to her tales and anecdotes, and then—the big jaw-breakers of words she uses! Why, I believe old Webster himself could have taken a few lessons from her. She uses words that are not to be found in his dictionary."

"Well, after all, that speaks volumes for trusty Bridget," Dorothy exclaimed as she passed through the door. "I shall run over to see Mr. Carroll again to-morrow," she said to Mrs. Carroll as she took hands with her in parting.

"By the way, Dorothy, what do you think of the doctor?" Mrs. Carroll asked, smilingly.

"Oh, I think he is just lovely—so perfectly calm and unassuming. He is the nicest

man I ever met," continued Dorothy. "He is very handsome too and—"

"Handsome and just as good as he is handsome, Dorothy," interrupted Mrs. Carroll. "The people around fairly idolize him. He is very kind to the poor. There's a great chance for some lucky girl now, lassie. Goodness only knows, perhaps you will think a whole lot of him some day, my girl."

Dorothy's cheeks flushed crimson.

"Perhaps!" she answered. The next minute the old iron gate closed with a bang that had some significance in it.



## CHAPTER XIX.—Roses and Carnations.

On her way home, after her visit to Mrs. Carroll, Dorothy could not help thinking of Dr. Mathers. It was no wonder that the people all idolized him. He was so kind and gentle and so very pleasant in his manner and conversation, and he always carried a goodly amount of sunshine with him into a patient's sick room.

Dr. Mathers rose in Dorothy's memory continually, erect and manly looking, and for hours she could not brush the picture aside. She had seen him at Carroll's standing thoughtfully near the curtained window. The parting sun stole in tenderly and settled its glint upon his half-gray hair. His face was that of a man who took his work seriously yet derived therefrom a great deal of happiness and compensation.

Everywhere we meet the cold, disappointed man who has lost hope and given up so easily, whose name is a stain on the world's bright escutcheon. Failure has touched him with her scorching wings, and the Past, Present and Future are enigmas, alike gloomy and uninteresting to him. He has simply missed the "get" of this great, absorbing

life. But Charles Mathers was not such a man. He was a toiler in the living Present; he was trying to do all the good he could in this life. The world had treated him kindly and given him plenty from her store of riches, and he had accepted it all with an humble heart.

When Dorothy reached home she told her parents of her pleasant visit to the Carrolls. "Mrs. Carroll," she added, "is going to the opera to-night, but poor Michael will have to stay at home."

"Why?" questioned her father. "I suppose he will have to keep the cat and bird company. Mrs. Carroll, you know, dotes so on her pets. Ah, well, she's never had any children, and poor old Tabby and little yellow-coated Dicky are all the world to her."

"No, it is not that. When I reached the place I found Mr. Carroll in bed."

"In bed, Dorothy!" exclaimed Mrs. Fairfax in great surprise. "Surely the old man's not ill?"

"Yes, mother, the poor fellow slipped and fell. At first they thought he had fractured his leg, but Dr. Mathers was there when I arrived, and, after a careful examination, he said there was no break, but the ligaments were badly torn."

"Poor, old Michael!" exclaimed Mrs. Fairfax, pathetically. "To think he'd have to be so unlucky in his old days!"

"Mrs. Carroll," Dorothy continued, "at last consented to go to the theater, after I had promised to send Bridget over to keep Michael company. He is suffering, you know, and requires looking after. They were so glad I called."

"Of course you met Dr. Mathers?" interposed the father, looking up from the evening paper. Before Dorothy could answer her mother said: "I hope he impressed you favorably."

"Yes, I met him," Dorothy answered demurely, "and I felt quite interested in him. He is a good-souled fellow, handsome and clever. But, mother, I am sure he has met some one by this time whom he likes better than himself. One of these mornings you will hear that he has been married and that he has gone off somewhere on his honeymoon."

Just then Mr. and Mrs. Fairfax's eyes met. In that brief instant the two had held kindred thoughts, and in their hearts lingered the wish that God would some day favor Dorothy with the love of such a man as Dr. Charles Mathers. He had been entertained and feted by the queenly mothers of

scores of marriageable daughters in past years, but so far he had thought it wise and best not to venture out upon the uncertain matrimonial seas that lead some into dangerous, stormy deeps of disquietude, and others into peaceful havens of rest.

At an early hour that evening crowds filled the Lyceum. Billington, true to her gifted child, had turned out *en masse* to honor Dorothy, and hundreds went home delighted with the performance. The young singer had done herself full justice.

Dr. Mathers was in the audience that evening. His eyes fairly revelled in the beautiful costumes and scenery, and his ears eagerly drank in the soulful music of Gounod. Dorothy made a beautiful Marguerite, gentle and innocent as a saint, and, when in the depths of her sorrow she threw herself at the Blessed Mother's feet and poured out the prayerful threnody that echoed through her pure soul, the eyes of hundreds of her listeners filled suddenly with tears. Even Dr. Mathers' heart was touched as it had never been before.

"Miss Fairfax is so good and pure," he thought to himself, and, as he listened to the sound of her voice and followed her through the different scenes of the opera, a

longing desire stole into his heart that he might some day learn to love and win this beautiful woman. And he asked God to draw their hearts closer together. He could not help envying Faust this Marguerite. Such strange feelings seemed to overpower him—feelings that never before disturbed the serenity of his heart, and, when later Faust sang “*La Parlate D’Amor*,” the lively, tender Flower Song, his temples fairly throbbed. What was he singing? The melody haunted him; the words set his brain mad with delight. Faust seemed to have taken the very words from his lips that he would have liked to whisper to Dorothy. He raised himself in his chair, closed his eyes and listened to the haunting melody—and Dorothy rose before him not as Marguerite, but as plain Dorothy Fairfax, just as he had seen her for the first time at Mrs. Carroll’s in her brown seal-skin coat and red walking dress. Again the words of the singer came to him. He did not see Faust: he saw only himself, standing before Dorothy and singing, in all the gladness of his manly heart, the self-same words that floated from the stage—

“Gentle flow’rs in the dew  
Bear love from me!

Tell her no flow'r is rarer  
Tell her that she is fairer,  
Dearer to me than all  
Though fair you be!

Gentle flow'rs in the dew  
Bear sighs from me!  
Tell her in accents tender,  
Tell her that I'll defend her  
Gladly my life surrender,  
Her knight to be!"

For days after Dorothy's face haunted him. No matter where he went or what he did, she rose before him. In the sick room, in the very presence of death, she came to him in fancy and comfortingly touched his hand. It was like the whisper of a tender prayer to his sanguine ears. He always felt better after it, and it seemed to nerve him for the day's battle. He could not forget her; he tried hard at times to do so, but without avail. She had been thrown across his life's path by God, and in his heart of hearts he thanked Him for it. No, he could never forget Dorothy. Strange, tender feelings held his heart in thrall. They were the feelings that came through Love's first, kindly ministrations. Life's joyous rosetime was here.



Dorothy's success of that first performance was repeated. The elite of the city filled the Lyceum every evening; they were a music-loving people. Besides, hundreds came long distances to hear her sing. The papers were enthusiastic. They printed long interviews and followed them with short sketches of her young life. Everybody seemed to be proud of Dorothy, proud that she was a Billington girl, glad that she had mounted to a place of eminence in her noble art. Hers was still the beautiful character, humble and unassuming, gracious and unaffected. For two weeks she had appeared nightly in the various operas in her repertoire.

Dorothy was glad when the last evening arrived. Singing these exacting roles night after night was heavy work. The prima-donna would soon be relieved of her anxiety. Signor Lamperti called at her home a few days before closing night and asked: "Well, Dorothy, what will we stage closing-night?"

"Anything at all, Signor, so far as I am concerned."

"The public is clamoring for 'Faust'. It was the opening bill and made a very good impression, I believe."

"Then let it be 'Faust'. I would just as leave be Marguerite again."

That evening the largest crowd in years poured into the theater. Dr. Mathers would not have missed the performance for all the gold in Billington. His office boy, little Toby, whom he had rescued from the streets some years before, was busy brushing off his overcoat.

"Hurry, Toby! 'Tis eight o'clock and I will have to go presently," he exclaimed. "I am going to the theater to-night. If any people call me, tell them I will be back between eleven and eleven-thirty."

Toby stood upon a chair and held his master's coat for him.

"Now, Toby, don't fall asleep! Watch the door-bell and the telephone!"

"I'll try hard to keep awake, doctor," and he rubbed his eyes like a spoiled child.

"Well, good-bye, Toby," the doctor cried as he made his way through the office door. Just then the door-bell rang loudly.

"Toby, go see who it is," the doctor commanded.

In another minute the boy returned.

"Who is it wants me?"

"A poor, old woman. I could not catch her name. Her boy is very sick."

"Where does she live?"

"Two miles on the other side of the river."

“Well! well! that is too bad—ready to go to the opera and disappointed again,” the doctor exclaimed as he threw his coat and hat upon the sofa. “But send the woman in, Toby!”

The woman entered. She was poorly clad and looked as if she had not tasted good food for a long time.

“Be seated, madam!” the doctor directed as he kindly handed her a chair. “What can I do for you to-night?”

“Ah, my poor boy’s very sick, doctor. I am afraid he’s dying,” the woman cried out in tears. “He’s all I have in the world, doctor, and he’s been such a good boy.”

“How old is he?”

“Sixteen, this coming winter. He worked until noon to-day, when a severe pain overtook him. Oh, he was a good boy, and I am afraid the Lord will take him. If it hadn’t been for him I’d have drifted to the poorhouse long ago.”

“Is he the only child?”

“No. He is the oldest of ten, but the only bread-winner in the family.”

“Is your husband dead, madam?”

“No, worse than that. He’s a heavy drinker and, when he is drunk, he abuses us shamefully. He hasn’t bought a loaf of bread for us in months.”

"Then you cannot depend upon him for help at all?"

"No, sir!"

"What's your name?"

"Mary Bland, sir."

"Where do you live?"

"At 66 Oxford Road. So come, come at once! The poor boy's crying with pain. I left him suffering to come here. Perhaps he is dead now." And she cried bitterly. "I have no money to give you," she continued, "but I am an honest woman and Tom's an honest boy, and I am sure God will reward you. So, doctor, you'll come at once, won't you?"

A hundred thoughts pierced Mathers' brain. Instantly his thoughts stole to Dorothy. It was exactly a quarter after eight. The orchestra was then finishing the overture. In another minute or two the curtain would rise. How he had planned all day to have his evening free, but now it seemed at the last moment that his hopes were to be dashed to pieces. His heart longed for Dorothy and the sound of her voice; yet now he stood at the cross roads not knowing which way to turn—Dorothy on the one side beckoning him to the theater, Mary Bland on the other begging him to come to the bed-

side of her dying son. He was lashed by two fires, but the next minute decided it all.

The doctor's eyes stole down to the pitiful bundle of rags before him, and, noticing the poor woman's tears, his conscience whispered to him: "Go to the sick boy! 'Tis there you are needed." Then in a strong, kind voice he said to Mrs. Bland: "You may go home. I'll come over at once to see Tom."

"God repay you for it all!" she murmured with a thrill of emotion, as she pressed the doctor's hands in her own and disappeared in the darkness.

Thirty minutes later Dr. Mathers stood at Tom's bed-side. The poor boy was desperately ill. He had chills and high fever and considerable pain.

"What do you think ails him, doctor?"

"Appendicitis. He will have to be operated upon immediately. It is dangerous to wait until morning."

That very evening Dr. Mathers saved faithful Tom's life at the hospital. When it was all over he returned to his office and sank into his chair, tired and sleepy.

During the performance that evening the audience went wild with applause, and, when Dorothy sang the ever delightful Jewel-Song, the climax was reached. When the last word echoed from her lips, a beau-

tiful bouquet of roses and carnations fell suddenly at her feet. She picked them up graciously and smiled tenderly. The people clapped hands and cheered loudly. The whole audience seemed a waving sea of handkerchiefs. It was a great triumph for Dorothy Fairfax.

When she returned to her dressing room she examined the bouquet more closely.

"Are they not delicious?" she remarked to her maid as the latter was loosening her gown. "I wonder who could have been so kind as to send me them?"

A little card fell to the floor. The maid picked it up and handed it to the singer.

"From Dr. Mathers!" Dorothy exclaimed loudly, overcome with surprise. "Goodness gracious! The great surgeon has deigned to notice me. I feel flattered."

The flowers had really made her feel very happy indeed, and the thought that they had come from Billington's most noted man sent a thrill through her heart that carried an added share of happiness.

"It was so good of him to send me these roses and carnations," she whispered, and again she raised them to her face. But this time her lips touched the little white card. "I only wish—I—"

Without, there were sounds of loud ap-

plause, but Dorothy stood still in the little dressing room, wrapped in deep thought. She was just then thinking of Charles Mathers. "I only wish—I—", she muttered again to herself, but she did not finish the sentence.

"Come, Dorothy, they are waiting for you on the stage" shouted her maid as she tied the last bow in her hair. "I'm afraid you've missed your cue."

"Surely not, Frances. I must have been dreaming. Ah, yes, there is the tenor singing the opening bars to the duet." And gaily she darted out of the dressing-room and made for the open stage.

In another minute their voices blended admirably, and soon Dorothy was lost to everybody but Faust—and Dr. Mathers. The gentle singer had just finished reading the language of love and flowers, and, from that time on, roses and carnations were ever her special choice.



## CHAPTER XX.—When Love is Master.

It was eleven o'clock when Dr. Mathers returned to his office, after he had seen that Tom Bland was comfortable at the hospital. He had had a hard day's work and felt glad that the night was at hand to give him the rest he needed sorely. Toby, the office-boy, had fallen asleep on the couch, waiting for his master. The doctor, however, did not disturb the lad. There were no messages on the slate. Dr. Mathers knew there had been no calls.

It was a cold night out-of-doors, and the office was quite chilly. A raw October wind was tossing the leaves about in small clouds, after the light down-pour of rain which had soon subsided. The voices of Autumn were piping across the hills, and the skies were beginning to assume their leaden, gray color.

Charles threw an extra supply of coal upon the fire. Then he lit a cigar and for some time followed the pictures that fancy painted for him in the pale blue clouds of smoke. And presently in the soft haze Dorothy rose before him in a long, flowing, silken garment of white, her eyes tender and loving, and, from her lips, some cheery message seemed sounding.

"The Years between."

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The opera was over. Out upon the slippery pavement sounded the footsteps of the homeward-bound theater-goers. Charles could not help wondering what kind of a reception they had given Dorothy.

"I wonder," he mused to himself, "if she received my roses and carnations? I wonder did she appreciate them, or throw them aside carelessly?"

Such thoughts as these kept his mind active as he sat ruffling away idly at his cigar. Suddenly the telephone sounded in the outer hall. In an instant Toby was on his feet and, rubbing his eyes carelessly, he gave way to a couple of yawns. Then he made his way into the hall as the telephone ceased ringing.

"Hello!" he called over the wire in his boyish, musical voice.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At Mr. Fairfax's house."

"Miss Dorothy—yes."

"Very well. I'll tell him to come at once."

Somewhat excited Toby hung up the receiver and, running into the little room, exclaimed wildly:—"Doctor, you're to come over to Fairfax's right away. Miss Dorothy slipped and fell upon the icy steps at the theater, but a few minutes ago, just as she

was leaving the place after the performance. They think she's sustained a severe fracture. She's in great pain and they want you at once."

The color left the doctor's lips. He rose from his chair somewhat nervously; his heart felt a sickly pain, and he grabbed his overcoat and started hurriedly, grip in hand.

"It is really too bad, the poor thing!" he said to himself as he closed the office-door. "I hope it is nothing serious."

When he reached the Fairfax home all was excitement. But a few minutes before the ambulance had brought Dorothy home and what a shock it was to her parents when several strong men, carrying the stretcher upon which lay the helpless girl, entered the house. In her hands she held the treasured bouquet of roses and carnations. It was too bad Charles had not arrived a few minutes earlier. It would have done his heart good to have seen how zealously Dorothy guarded the precious flowers.

The doctor stepped lightly into the drawing room where the injured girl lay. As he entered she smiled gently through her suffering and exclaimed, somewhat girlishly: "Oh, doctor, I am so glad you came. I am afraid I have a bad foot. But in the first

place I must thank you for the flowers. They are so beautiful. It was really kind of—". A sharp pain in her foot weakened her so that she could not finish the sentence. Even in her misery and suffering those roses and carnations were uppermost in her mind, and she could not help thanking the donor at the first opportunity.

Dr. Mathers made a thorough examination of the foot and reported a bad fracture above the ankle.

"And what will all this mean to me, doctor?" Dorothy asked, somewhat sadly.

"Oh, about four to six weeks in bed, Miss Fairfax," Charles answered. He felt like calling her Dorothy, but he had not known her long enough for that.

"Well, I suppose, I have to make the best of it, then, mother," she said to Mrs. Fairfax, who stood in tears at the foot of the couch. "Mother, you must not cry so—'tis only a break, and I will soon be able to walk again," she added encouragingly.

"Yes," interrupted Dr. Mathers, "it will only be a matter of time. We will have to give nature a chance—that's all. She is, after all, the best physician. I will require the assistance of a nurse to help set the fracture. There is little swelling and I think

the sooner the foot is attended to the better. Whom shall I telephone for?"

"Sister Angela," exclaimed Dorothy gladly.

"But," interrupted her mother, "that is impossible, child. You know as well as I that the nuns never do private nursing."

"I knew it, mother. Her name just came to my lips. She is so good and kind, mother. She is a sweet, little nun—just a darling. It's heaven to be sick when she is around."

"Sister Angela, you know, doctor," said the mother, "nursed Dorothy through a very serious illness four years ago, and she has never forgotten her."

"Miss Fairfax," remarked the doctor, "I am sure Sister Angela would be pleased to nurse you again, but, if such were your wish, we would have to take you to the hospital."

"I would rather remain at home here with mother, doctor," Dorothy replied. "So procure a nurse at once!"

In the course of six weeks Dorothy was able to be up again. The fracture had united rapidly, and there was no deformity. To be sure, at first, walking proved difficult, but the days in turn brought steady improvement and in a short time Dorothy was able to move along without the aid of crutch or

cane. During all this time Dr. Mathers had been very attentive to his patient. He visited her daily and generously kept the vases on the mantel filled with the choicest flowers. He brought her books and a hundred other things. It was all so unlike Dr. Mathers. He always stood on professional ground so far as his patients were concerned, but with Dorothy it had been another matter. The barriers had to be broken down in some way; his heart would have no rest so long as the present conditions prevailed. He often wished to tell her just how disturbed his feelings were since she had come into his busy life. But he was silent and thanked God for it all. She was Love's own white angel. She was so good and pure, he did not even feel worthy to touch her hand. But he loved her and there was joy and pain in that love.

Dorothy, too, was a changed girl since the day she had first looked upon him and, deep down in her heart, she placed the love she hoped might be given him—some day.

One evening Mr. and Mrs. Fairfax were sitting in the drawing-room, listening to Dorothy at the piano. It was the first time she had sung since her accident, and it was a treat for all concerned. She warbled through lullabies, ballads and familiar operatic airs.

Then she hit upon "Home, Sweet Home." Slowly and pathetically the old familiar words floated through the room—

"Be it ever so humble,  
There's no place like home."

It was like the song of the thrush in the fresh morning sunshine, when the fading stars hang their heads together and listen eagerly for the sound of a bird-voice, loath to depart. Her voice was full of music; it was wonderfully tender.

When she finished the second verse the door-bell rang loudly, and Bridget entered and announced with a broad smile: "A caller for you, Miss Dorothy!"

"Who can it be?"

"Dr. Mathers, Miss Dorothy," was the answer as the maid laughed merrily and bowed herself out of the room.

Dorothy's cheeks flushed crimson. "He had only called this morning," she said to herself. "I wonder what brings him here now?" With a smile on her face she left the room.

"What is the matter, Katherine?" Mr. Fairfax asked his wife, having noticed that her eyes were full of tears.

"Oh, nothing much. The last song Dorothy sang always does get the better of my

feelings," she answered with a touch of emotion. "And besides—"

"Besides what, Katherine?"

"Oh, I am afraid we will soon lose Dorothy."

"Lose Dorothy—what do you mean?"

"I mean that she will be leaving us one of these days."

"What for?"

"Why to be married, of course. Have you noticed how attentive Dr. Mathers has been to her all during her illness, and Dorothy only told me this morning that she would lay down her life for him. Something had stolen into her heart, she said, that made her think all the world of him."

"But Katherine, you should not waste any tears over the matter. You should ask God to favor Dorothy with the love of a man of such sterling character as the doctor."

"Tears are not a sign of weakness but of strength," she interposed. "A coward never sheds tears. Besides, the singing was to blame for most of them. There is no mother born but hates giving up her daughter when the time comes, even though she marries a duke or a prince."

"But Katherine," he interrupted, "wait until the time comes. There's many a slip

'twixt the cup and the lip, you see, and, by the way, all these things are mere workings of your own imagination. I am sure Dr. Mathers is quite on cool terms with Cupid. Many doctors are, you know."

Dorothy greeted Dr. Mathers with a smile when she entered the room where he was sitting.

"I am so glad you dropped in," she said, somewhat nervously.

"I thought I would come to hear you sing a little, Miss Fairfax. You remember your inviting me to call some evening for that purpose. You know I am passionately fond of music."

Dorothy's invitation of some weeks previous stood the doctor in good stead. It helped him to throw a cloak over the real motive of his coming. For a half hour or so the two conversed on commonplace topics. Then Dorothy rose to light the gas.

"Ah, never mind," he said, "the moon will reach the window presently, and then we will have all the light we desire."

"I love to sit in the dark," Dorothy replied, "especially on a moonlit night. There is something fascinating about it and —" She could not finish the sentence, and what matter for both understood.



For some minutes neither spoke, and silence stole in between them like some happy angel and drew their hearts closer.

“Dorothy! Dorothy!” at last exclaimed Charles. “The time has come and I must tell you all.”

The girl trembled like a frightened dove. Charles could play the doctor’s part no longer, so he stole over to the sofa whereon Dorothy was sitting and, in the fullness of his love, poured out his heart-cry to her. It was a passionate appeal, and she came to his rescue just as the moon stole in through the filmy lace curtains and painted strange pictures on the walls. A vagrant breeze passed by slowly. It seemed to pause a while at the curtained window. Then it heard the sound of a man’s voice within. It was only a whisper—

“Dorothy! Dorothy! I love you!”

The sentence was loud enough for Dorothy’s ears, and she laid her head upon Charles’ manly breast, and, in that brief moment, drank in the joy and ecstasy that always comes with love’s acceptance.



## **Chapter XXI.—On Life's Common Way.**

The night on which Mrs. Atherton landed in Billington the streets were practically deserted. A heavy snow-storm was falling and the strong wind was busy piling up drifts of snow. It was a stormy night. One caught here and there only the shadow of a policeman passing down the street. Hundreds of cheerful windows threw their pleasant light out upon the snow-filled streets, but they did not seem to attract the attention of the little woman with the light, yellow shawl, who wandered up and down narrow, deserted streets, in and around the various public places. Poor woman! She was not a responsible being. God only knew what thoughts tortured her. She had been an inmate of the House of Pain these long months. Poor Mrs. Atherton! Would that God might restore her senses that she might recognize the old familiar surroundings of her native city! But alas! she stared vaguely at everything as she passed. Nothing seemed to attract her; nothing wakened a faint glimmering of reason within her. Her mind was active, spinning out all manner of horrible thoughts, tossed constantly in the frenzy of wild delirium. Yet,

she sped on through the cold and snow, aimlessly but hurriedly, like a pursued hare. Oh, if Dr. Mathews only knew that on this night of nights Mrs. Atherton — the benefactress of his early years—whom everyone thought dead, was walking the very streets of Billington, perhaps only a few blocks from his office, what a happy man he would be! He would rush out into that heavy blinding snow-storm and take her into his arms and press her to his heart. It would be the grandest, noblest, proudest moment in all his life to hear her speak again, and to feel the touch of her hand. For long years they had both walked the hard, bitter road of suffering.

Mrs. Atherton hurried on as if hounded by some terrible dread. At last she reached a place where three streets met. The glare of the electric lights overhead brightened the surroundings. She halted and raised her eyes to the skies. The hard look had softened on her face. Even a smile came and went silently. No one would have thought then that the poor woman was ill; she was so perfectly calm, and the wild, maniacal look had left her. The next moment her mind was again upset. Tears came to her and she sobbed convulsively. Again she wrung her hands pitifully and cried out to the lonely night:

“They’re after me—they’re going to kill me. Even the stars have daggers for me. Oh! ’tis terrible. Where am I, anyway?” She looked dazed. She had passed this way thousands of times before, but now it was all new to her.

What strange antics cannot a diseased mind play with one! It is almost incomprehensible, and yet within the brain, in its bony tenement, life takes its beginnings. One little flaw in the mechanism of this central station has helped to fill hospital and asylum with the poor fledglings of humanity.

The crazed woman pulled her yellow shawl about her and was off in a moment. One of her arms seemed powerless — she always made use of the other arm when helping herself. She heard footsteps on the creaking snow and her mind conjured up pictures of evil spirits following her to her doom.

The footsteps drew nearer. The frightened woman turned about slightly. She saw a man a block away. It was a policeman on his rounds. There were three roads for her to take. One led to the city hall, one to the city park and the third ran right into the heart of the slums. Mrs. Atherton chose the latter. Had she followed either of the other roads, the poor woman’s fate might have been a different one. But it seemed God

Himself directed her steps and led her by the hand. It was the darkest, gloomiest street of the three, but she, poor soul, had wandered down many a thorny, desolate way. She was used to the pain and misery of it all. She had seen and felt the thorns long enough. Perhaps now she was seeing roses. Let us hope she did. It helped to make her burden all the lighter.

Presently she reached the very heart of the slum district and here she met more people on the street. Nature had been kind and covered all the misery of the squalid surroundings with her white, snowy blanket. The houses were closely huddled together. It all reminded one of a miniature city. Here and there a drunkard stumbled along with the ill smell of whisky on his breath; now a door opened only to give vent to the sound of revelry within. On all sides, violent curses sounded—so irreverent that even the wistful-eyed, pure-hearted body paused on her journey and bowed her head in shame. Many a time in the years gone by, Mrs. Atherton herself had trodden these lonely thoroughfares, doing good and lifting wretched souls onto a higher plane of living. To-night she stood in these sin-steeped streets, poorest of the poor, not knowing what dark, heavy clouds might close in around her at any mo-

ment. But surely not one hand would be raised against her, powerless woman that she now was, in those streets, through which she herself had passed so often like a white angel of mercy, making hearts gladder and purer, which had come in touch with her gentle ministrations. Where were the souls she had helped, where the hearts she had strengthened? Where were the pale-cheeked mothers and the sickly, little children she had met daily on her rounds? Some of them, at least, must have been very near, but they would never have recognized her. She was so changed.

All these long years of suffering and privation would have worked marvelous changes in any one, and, now that Mrs. Atherton had again returned to Billington, not a soul amongst all her acquaintances would ever recognize her in that thin, little, wasted body. Suffering too was written on her sad features. No one can change looks so quickly as when Pain, the artist, takes his brush in hand.

Tired and worn the poor woman was at last forced to rest herself. Presently she stood face to face with the Old Woman's Refuge. Here kind friends gave weekly entertainments for the poor of the slum district. Father Salvini, the president of St.

Jerome's, somewhat older now than when the reader first met him, was the prime mover in this project. The pale, sick children of these desolate streets were very dear to him, and every afternoon he could be seen in the slum district, where Misery and Want walked apace, infusing fresh hope into the souls of men and women to whom life meant nothing but an ending in death. There, in the depths of life's dishonesties, he taught many an inspiring lesson. Children of circumstance, thrown upon the mercy of a selfish world — how his priest-heart loved them!

Mrs. Atherton halted for a moment at the Refuge door. Half a dozen windows threw pleasant lights into the night, and from several chimneys overhead clouds of black smoke rose to the sky. It was at least warm inside, and instinctively the frozen woman opened the door and entered the building. A concert was in progress. Hurriedly the new arrival thrust herself into a seat in the rear of the hall. No one had seen her enter. The hundreds of men and women present were listening to the words of a speaker on the stage. It was no other than Father Salvini. He was delivering another message to them. Mrs. Atherton followed the gestures of the speaker, but that was all. She was tired, and

for a time her mind retained its equilibrium, but she was dead to all her surroundings. When the speaker had finished a beautiful woman stepped out onto the stage. It was Dorothy Fairfax, come to sing at Father Salvini's request for the benefit of the poor of the city. Bernice Chadwick, her Leipzig companion, walked over to the piano. It was the singer's first appearance in public since her accident. Dr. Mathers was also there. Father Salvini had just joined him in the audience.

"They are an orderly crowd," exclaimed the doctor. "I expected noise and riot, but the poor things certainly know how to behave."

"I have had no trouble with them whatever in this regard," the priest replied, "since coming among them. They like the talks and they are very fond of music. I asked Dorothy to sing some old song—something they all knew. They will appreciate it more."

Miss Chadwick played the opening bars on the piano, and presently Dorothy's magnificent voice echoed through the hall in an old, familiar strain which everyone recognized. The men and women followed every sentence, every word, every syllable—it was all so very beautiful. Dorothy felt elated.

"The Years between."

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She had never sung before so spellbound an audience in all her life, and, as she stood before them and noticed the many to whom her voice had brought tears, she infused more heart and soul into her singing. These poor waifs of life had given her inspiration, and she drank deeply from the Pierian springs.

After all there **were** hearts in those desolate streets capable of changing with every thrill of emotion. It only wanted someone to move them. Love still sat reigning in the slums under adverse circumstances, perhaps, but Dorothy felt satisfied. So long as hearts expanded they had not yet turned to stone.

Dorothy's voice had also brought restfulness to Mrs. Atherton. Nothing quiets a diseased mind like music, and, as the singer was singing the poor woman at the rear of the hall closed her tired eyes and soon drifted into a quiet sleep.

When the concert was over the crowd filed out slowly and quietly. Mrs. Atherton was still asleep in her chair. No one seemed to take any notice of her. Only a few persons passed remarks.

"Too much whisky," said one.

"Too much 'dope,'" said another.

A few minutes later Dorothy and Father

Salvini came down the aisle with Dr. Mathers and Bernice Chadwick following.

"Well, Dorothy, how did all this impress you?" began the priest.

"Oh, it was delightful. The poor things, how they did enjoy it! I could have sung for them all the evening. They were so attentive. So many wept. Really, I could have sung for them all the evening. They were so attentive. So many wept. Really, I was touched; I could hardly finish the songs."

"Yes, I know they appreciated you. They will talk about it all the week."

"I shall sing for them again—any time, Father. I value their good will more than all the gold of the managers."

"Thanks, Dorothy! It is so good of you. But look! do you see the woman there near the door? She must be asleep. Come, let us see what is the matter!"

The two hurried over, and in a few seconds the doctor and Miss Chadwick were on the spot.

"I wonder, what is the matter?" the priest exclaimed. "She seems to be fast asleep, perhaps from the effects of whisky, cocaine, or morphine. I will try to wake her."

"The poor thing!" said Dorothy tenderly.  
ly.

"She may be ill, Father," exclaimed the doctor.

"Let us see if we can rouse her," suggested Father Salvini. But before his hand touched her, the woman opened her eyes and stared vaguely into the space. The next minute she cried convulsively and muttered:—

"Oh! they're coming to take me—those wicked men and women! Go away! Don't kill me—don't kill me! Oh, my head—my head!" She put her hands to the sides of her head, and her face writhed in deep suffering.

"That woman is very ill, Father," said Charles, as he strode to her side and felt her pulse. Then he put his hand to her forehead. It was very hot.

"She has also a very high fever," he continued.

"She must be taken care of somewhere."

"Send her to the hospital!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I will pay for her. Procure for her one of the best rooms."

It was a woman's sympathy for woman.

"But perhaps she has a husband or a son living here," interrupted the doctor. "They should be consulted first."

"The woman is a stranger to me," said Father Salvini. "I have never seen her before. There's Strand, the policeman on this

beat, just coming in. Perhaps he will know. He knows every face in these parts. Strand! Come here! Do you know this woman?" the priest called out.

"No, I do not, Father," was the answer. "She is a stranger to me. I saw her about an hour ago. I was a block away. She had a yellow shawl over her shoulders."

"Yes, here it is," exclaimed Dorothy, as she picked it up. It had fallen to the floor.

"Then she is not a resident here?"

"No, Father, she is a stranger. I received orders to be on a lookout for a woman with a yellow shawl, who was seen making her way from the depot. She was thought to be very sick. I followed her from the cross-roads, but lost track of her in the slums. I saw light in the Refuge, and thought she might have entered here."

"Then this is probably the woman," answered the priest. "Well, there is nothing to do then but to remove her to the hospital."

"And that as quickly as possible," rejoined the doctor. "She is very ill. Her one arm is powerless, and her eyesight also seems to be affected, and then, she is very feverish."

"Her deranged state of mind may be due to the fever, may it not, Charles?" questioned Dorothy.

"Yes, it may be just an ordinary delirium," he answered, "but I am afraid she will not recover. There is something serious at the bottom of this."

"Well, do all you can for her, Charles," said Dorothy, sadly.

A few minutes later the ambulance was at the door and the sick woman was placed on the stretcher and carried out.

"Drive to St. Mary's, quickly!" was the order Charles gave the driver. "I shall go with the woman," he exclaimed hurriedly.

"Father Salvini will accompany you, Dorothy and Bernice."

Slowly the ambulance passed along the snowy street, and, watchful as a nurse, Charles' eyes rested upon the little, thin body on the stretcher.

At last, the two, who for years had been separated, were face to face. They had met upon life's common way, strangers to each other now, God in heaven the only witness to the home-coming.



## Chapter XXII.—Sister Angela

The following morning Dorothy was one of the earliest visitors at St. Mary's. She had always taken a great interest in the sick before leaving for Paris and Leipzig. Not a day passed but that she sent flowers for the poor patients in the wards. Since her return from her singing tour she had visited the hospital about twice a week. She had a dear friend within those walls—Sister Angela—who filled the duties of head-nurse, a rather remarkable woman who had the tactics of nursing at her very fingers' ends. They had been girl friends at school. Dorothy took singing lessons and afterwards drifted to Europe. Sister Angela went to the convent, trained as a nurse and was placed in charge of St. Mary's.

Dorothy touched the button at the hospital entrance and presently the door opened. Sister Angela greeted her warmly. The gentle nun had a beautiful, spiritual face, was of medium height and looked the ideal nurse.

"Ah, Dorothy, it is you," she exclaimed gladly. "Step inside! I am so glad to see you!"

Soon the two were seated in the reception room, engaged in lively conversation.

"She had a very poor night," the nun went on. "She seemed to suffer a great deal of pain. At three o'clock I called up Dr. Mathers. It seemed a pity to get him out of bed, but it was necessary. So he came up. A half hour later several other doctors arrived and they decided to operate on her brain the first thing in the morning. I believe the operation is just over. I hear the elevator going. They are bringing down the patient. Pardon me just a minute, Dorothy. I know you are anxious, and I shall send in Dr. Mathers to see you before he leaves the hospital. I know, my dear, you will be pleased to see him," and she laughed heartily and left the room.

Soon after Dr. Mathers entered. He looked tired, almost exhausted.

"Good-morning, Dorothy," he said as he smiled graciously.

"Good-morning, Charles!"

Then the surgeon seated himself.

"Oh, this chair feels fine," he exclaimed. "This operation has nearly used me up. It was very difficult and so tedious," and he yawned pitifully and stretched himself with a great deal of satisfaction.

"Pardon me, Dorothy, but I really cannot help it."

"I believe you, Charles," she answered thoughtfully.

"I am sure the work was very trying. But how is the unfortunate woman?"

"Oh, she stood the operation tolerably well, but she is a very sick woman."

"I was surprised to hear she was operated upon."

"I am sure you must have been. But it was high time she fell into someone's hands. She had an abscess of the brain which I opened. It was caused no doubt by the breaking down of a small tumor that had grown slowly for years. Altogether the operation was successful, but—"

"Do you think she will recover, Charles? I would like to see her get well."

"She may, certainly. She has a chance, but, of course, there is a serious prognosis."

"And do you think she will regain all her senses?" asked Dorothy, eagerly.

"She may in time. Nature, you know, works wonders," he answered thoughtfully.

"Then she will be able to tell us her life's story. Who knows perhaps even now her husband and children are waiting for her."

For six months Mrs. Atherton lay at St. Mary's showing slight mental improvement. She had withstood all the immediate effects of the operation. Her mind was more rest-



less; it did not border so much on the maniacal state, but at times her lips rambled on incoherently, and those around could not pick up and join the threads of her strange discourse. It was nothing but a mixture of people and places which they had never seen.

Dorothy visited her daily. The strange woman drew her like a magnet. There was a mellow softness about her face that appealed to her. She had evidently been a woman of culture in her day, who had seen much of life's sunshine and later some of its shadow. In time, however, the strength came back to her paralyzed arm and to her eyes as well.

Another six months glided by quickly and by this time Mrs. Atherton showed greater mental improvement. One day when Sister Angela carried in a bouquet of roses from Dorothy and placed them on the little table near the bed, she exclaimed in somewhat of a whisper:—

“What has happened to my head, Sister? It seems to have caved in.” But a moment before she had felt the spot where the surgeon had made his incision to remove a piece of bone.

It was the first sensible thing the poor woman had said in a year, and Sister An-

gela felt necessarily elated. Some weeks later she again called the gentle nun to her bedside. Sister Angela obeyed.

“Take this!” Mrs. Atherton remarked as she tore a small, gold locket from her neck. It was a pretty piece of jewelry, set with a medium-sized diamond. “Take it—you have been so good to me! It is all I have.”

Sister Angela refused the gift on general principles, but Mrs. Atherton was not satisfied. She pulled the nun to her side and pressed it into her hand.

Sister Angela sat down. Her patient was proving quite interesting, and she longed to have a little chat with her.

“Where am I, anyway?” inquired the patient.

“You are in the hospital,” the nun answered.

“The hospital?” she repeated doubtfully. Then she shook her head in protest. “No, that cannot be, I—”

Sister Angela sought to continue further inquiry and asked: “What is your name, my dear?”

“Name? name?” she repeated again and again, wrapped in deep thought. She could not catch the meaning of the word. Her mind was evidently clouded just then.

“Ah, yes,” the woman replied as a smile stole to her face, “it’s Mrs. Ath—.” She made several attempts to finish the word, but memory again played her false.

Dorothy called at the usual hour next morning to see Mrs. Atherton. It was a delightful May day with sun overhead and violets sprouting up everywhere through the green, wet earth. A pleasant breeze lingered about the large lawn in front of the hospital, charged with the fragrance of lilacs and apple-blossoms.

Sister Angela, too, had quit the hospital for a half hour or so in the open. Nature had tempted her out-of-doors to revel and exult in the quickening life that was everywhere. It was a grand awakening, ushered in by the coming of the birds and the leaves and the blossoms. The ears of mankind seemed to be listening eagerly for the sound of music through the parting spring’s open door. Birds sang their songs, the perfume-laden breezes joined them in happy chorus, and the wonderful orchestra of the trees played a sweet accompaniment through the livelong day.

Sister Angela saw Dorothy coming up the hospital path and she went out to meet her.

“Is not this a glorious day, Dorothy?” she said as she took the girl by the hand.

“Yes, it is a perfect jewel of a morning,” Dorothy answered. “I came up to take my patient out into the open air. Dr. Charles thought it would do her a world of good.”

“It will be good for her. She has been sitting up several weeks now, and she should be strong enough to take a little walk about the hospital grounds. But come, Dorothy, let us sit down for a minute. I have something to tell you.”

The two walked over to the bench under the large, pine tree but a few feet away and then sat down.

“Do you know, Dorothy,” the nun went on, “that friend of yours is getting along splendidly. Her mental condition is improving rapidly, I think.”

“Is that so, Sister? I am glad to hear it,” interrupted Dorothy.

“Yesterday she seemed very bright. I went in to see her and she made me take her locket for having been so good to her. She seemed to be perfectly rational, though she had some trouble collecting her thoughts.”

“It is wonderful!” exclaimed Dorothy. “I am glad to hear it. And she gave you a locket? Let me see it! Where did she get it from?”

“She tore the chain from her neck.”

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"It is wonderful!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I am glad to hear it. And she gave you a look-et? Let us see it! Where did she get it from?"

"She took the chain from her neck."

“It must have been a very great treasure of hers in her day. May I open it, Sister?” questioned Dorothy, inquisitively.

“Certainly, dear.”

Thereupon Dorothy opened the locket. Upon the outside were engraved the two words—

From Charles.”

Within, Dorothy found the picture of a young man.

“That must be the Charles mentioned on the locket, Dorothy,” said Sister Angela.

“It is probably her son,” said Dorothy.

“She seemed very talkative yesterday and—”

“Did you ask her who Charles was?”

“No, I did not, but I asked her her name.”

“What did she say?”

“She said it was Mrs. Ath— Mrs. Ath—. She repeated the word twice, but she could not finish the name.”

Dorothy jumped up from the bench in great excitement. “Sister! I’m sure I have found out this woman at last. It must be Mrs. Atherton, the woman whom Dr. Charles has been looking for all these years. She was the great benefactress of his life. But you know the story. I have told you it hundreds of times.”

“And the locket—” interrupted Sister Angela.

“You see,” answered Dorothy, “it bears the inscription, ‘From Charles.’ Might not Charles have given it to her with his picture enclosed some time in the long ago?”

“Dorothy, I feel you are on the right track at last.”

“Oh, God be thanked a thousand times!” Dorothy exclaimed joyously. “I hope the strange woman will turn out to be Mrs. Atherton. It will make Charles very happy. His not having been able to locate her has been the one great regret of his life. You know, Sister, he believes her dead. So for the present, say nothing to the doctor about the discovery.”

“Depend on me, Dorothy. He shall not hear of it. We will move slowly but surely in the matter. I will help you to unearth the mystery.”

“And then some day, Sister, I will be able to surprise him. Oh, that some day! Were it only here now!”





### Chapter XXIII.—Tangled Threads

That same morning Dorothy took Mrs. Atherton for a walk, but the former said nothing about the locket or her conversation with Sister Angela. She thought it best to wait awhile. Mrs. Atherton did much talking while they were out walking, but it proved quite an effort to do so. Her memory seemed very bad; she could not summon up the words as quickly as she would have liked.

"You have been so good to me," she said to Dorothy. "Pray, tell me who you are?"

Thereupon Dorothy related how she had come across her in the Refuge down in the slums. She told of her removal to St. Mary's, where a wonderful operation had been performed upon her. It all seemed like a dream to the poor woman. She was surprised, dazed and could not collect her thoughts. The past two years were enigmas she could not solve. She could not recall a thing that had happened. Her mind was a blank. There was a missing link somewhere between the Past and Present. Her memory could not supply it.

"St. Mary's hospital! St. Mary's—," she

turned the words over and over again in her mind and for a long time tried to recall memories that knocked at her heart's door. The sound of the word was familiar to her.

She raised her eyes to the imposing edifice beyond the green stretch of lawn and exclaimed: "Then that's St. Mary's—let me see!" And she turned about and took in the surroundings. "I have it at last," she said. "Why, to be sure, I'm in Bill — in Bill—." She could not finish the word and Dorothy came to the rescue.

"Is it Billington?" she asked.

"Ah, yes — Billington, that's the word. Why, this used to be my old home."

There was no doubt in Dorothy's mind now that the woman beside her was no other than Mrs. Atherton. A new-born joy filled her womanly heart.

For the first time in many months Mrs. Atherton knew where she was. But how she happened to reach Billington was a puzzle to her—a puzzle which even later time never solved.

Dorothy was satisfied with her progress that afternoon. Before she left the hospital she sought Sister Angela and told her of the further discoveries.

"I am afraid, Sister, I shall have to resort to Sherlock Holmes' tactics to keep all this

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away from Charles' ears and eyes. I want to surprise him you know very soon."

"Yes, Dorothy," interrupted Sister Angela, "a bird whispered to me the other day that wedding bells were to ring some time in August for two people whom I knew very well."

"You little dear!" ejaculated Dorothy. "Who ever told you that?"

"Ah, my girl, I know all about it. Your mother was here to see me the other day and she told me."

"I am afraid I shall have to give mother a good scolding. But then she did not know I wanted to surprise you. Yes, Sister, Charles and I expect to be married the latter part of August, and I intend to keep this Mrs. Atherton surprise for him until then. What do you say?"

"It will be glorious, Dorothy. Think how Charles will feel, when the patient, upon whom he has performed such a wonderful operation, turns out to be his good friend, Mrs. Atherton, whom he has thought dead all these years."

"But I am so afraid, Sister, the cat will be out of the bag long before the expected time and then all our plans will come to naught. Whatever can we do to prevent Mrs. Ath-

erton and Charles from meeting in the meantime?"

"I heard the doctor saying he was going to take a holiday soon—a couple of months I think he said. Could not you manage to get him off as quickly as possible? With Mrs. Atherton between ourselves we could manage nicely, I think."

That same evening Dr. Mathers called to see Dorothy. They were seated in the drawing room and soon Mrs. Fairfax joined them. After some preliminary conversation Dr. Mathers said: "I think I shall take a holiday one of these days, perhaps in a month—the beginning of June. I am just about at the end of the tether."

"Yes, I am afraid, Charles, you are forgetting the laws of the conservation of energy," said Mrs. Fairfax.

"You must get away," interrupted Dorothy. "You are not well at all. Only to-day I heard at the hospital that you should take a rest. But what is a month for you, dear? You should have at least two, and, May being an especially delightful month full of that comfort and restfulness which you badly need, why not go as soon as possible?"

"That is good advice, Dorothy. I think it will be better to take a longer holiday."

Dorothy smiled. She felt sure now that the Atherton mystery would remain undiscovered so far as Charles was concerned.

"I am so situated now that I can easily go away. My patients are all off my hands so there is really nothing to keep me here except you, my sweet." And he smiled good-naturedly. "I think I will pack up and leave to-morrow for there is little knowing when something may happen to keep me at home."

"I don't care how long you stay, Charles," Dorothy continued with a smile, "so long as you are back for the twenty-eighth of August. Remember I want you to dissect that wedding-cake. It is in your line you know, dear." And the three laughed loudly.

The door opened and Mr. Fairfax entered the room. "That laughter was enough to wake the dead," he exclaimed as he greeted them.

"Well, my girl, how is the stranger getting on up at St. Mary's? Did you see her to-day?"

"Very well, father. We went for a walk to-day. She enjoyed it immensely. But, of course, her mind is still clouded."

"That was a wonderful case," the old man said. "It speaks volumes for you, Charles. The whole city has heard of it."

The doctor lowered his eyes. He was an humble man and did not like fine compliments.

"The credit is not mine, Mr. Fairfax," he exclaimed. "It was the good nursing pulled her through. But she did remarkably well. Her eyesight and arm are better, and I really think in time her mind will clear up sufficiently that she will be able to tell us all about herself. At present we are perfectly at sea as to who she is and where she came from. I have not seen her for some weeks, but Sister Angela gives me good reports."

Dorothy felt elated that Charles was going on the early morning train. This prevented him from dropping in at St. Mary's before leaving. Now that Mrs. Atherton knew she was in Billington the only natural thing for her to do was to ask all manner of questions. Dorothy made doubly sure that Dr. Charles would not be the person to answer some of them. She wanted him hundreds of miles away for a little while.

The following day Dorothy called again at St. Mary's.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Atherton!"

"Good morning, Miss Fair—, Miss Fair—fax!" answered the patient. She had remembered. "My memory is getting better you see. I remembered your name."

“Do not call me Miss after this. Call me Dorothy. I like it better. I brought you some violets, Mrs. Atherton. They are fresh from the florist’s. Are they not lovely?”

“They are beautiful, Dorothy. I cannot understand why you are so good to me.”

“Because I have learned to love you,” the girl answered.

Dorothy could not help noticing how freely the woman talked. The night had indeed improved her mental condition. Now and then she would halt in the midst of a conversation, her eyes would wander, but it would only be for a second. Dorothy could not silence her friend’s tongue. Now that the poor woman was returning to her right senses she had so much to say and so many questions to ask.

“Ever since yesterday,” she continued, my mind seems to be clearing fast. “Now that I know I am in Billington, I am not puzzled so much. But the last few years is all chaos and darkness to me. The last I remember I was in Beresvale,” she continued. “It was a morning just like this, and I was sitting under the pine trees listening to the birds, but there the past ends. I don’t know how I drifted to Billington and never shall.”

“You said yesterday that Billington was

your home," remarked Dorothy, as she looked at the gray-haired woman before her.

"Ah, yes, child," she answered with a thrill of emotion. Just then a tear trickled down her cheek. "I lived here for many years. But then it is a long story. I shall tell it all to you some time. The incidents are coming back to me daily. Soon I shall have all the threads strung together again."

Then her thoughts drifted to her attending surgeon.

"My doctor has not been here to see me for sometime. If I was really as sick as you say I was, then he must have done wonders for me. How shall I ever repay him? Do you know I never asked him his name. He is a stranger to me, but then I have been away from Billington so long. I believe he never asked me mine."

"You were too sick to tell him. Believe me, you were only able to give us your name several days ago. And it is nearly a year and a half since the operation."

The woman looked strangely into the girl's eyes. She could not understand it at all. It seemed as if she had had a long sleep and was just now waking.

"By the way, Dorothy," Mrs. Atherton began, somewhat excitedly, "is there a Dr. Charles Mathers still practicing in the city?"



I knew him very well once—but it is a long story and—”

“Oh, do tell me, Mrs. Atherton!” Dorothy pleaded.

Dorothy at last felt sure of the ground whereon she had been building. It was Mrs. Atherton. She knew it. She felt it, and her heart beat violently. It was the most exciting moment she had ever experienced.

“Do tell me the story,” she cried as the room fairly swam before her eyes. “Tell me the story! I shall listen to every syllable. Dr. Mathers still resides in Billington. He is one of the greatest men in the city to-day.”

She did not like to say “surgeon.” She feared the word might carry the woman’s thoughts to the man who had so often stood at her bedside.

“Has he done well?” sighed the poor woman.

“Very well, indeed,” was the answer.

“Thank God! I am glad to hear it. I—”

“But, pray, tell me the story! Does it concern Dr. Mathers?”

“Yes, it concerns both of us,” she added with a sigh.

Then the tears came to her and, while they were falling fast, Mrs. Atherton told the story of her whole life, just as it has

been related in these pages — her leaving Billington, and her going to Beresvale, and her bitter hours of struggle there.

When she had finished Dorothy was also in tears. She had listened a hundred times to a similar story from her lover's lips.

"Oh, I am so glad to be back in Billington again," sighed Mrs. Atherton.

That afternoon Dorothy looked up Sister Angela before leaving the hospital. The news was too good to keep.

"You have straightened out the tangled threads at last," the gentle nun said to her, as they walked together down the paved walk that led from St. Mary's.



## Chapter XXIV.—In God's Good Time

It was not until some days had passed that Dorothy again called at St. Mary's and asked for Mrs. Atherton, having in the meantime instructed Sister Angela to keep good watch over the precious patient.

"By all means keep the visitors out of her room," she said, "and do not let Father Salvini, should he return, see her. She asked me about him yesterday; they were old friends, you know, and it did seem so good to be able to tell her that he was out of the city for a few weeks."

"Yes," replied the nun, "if she should divulge her name that would settle the whole matter. I know you are quite anxious to surprise him also."

Dorothy had called for Mrs. Atherton for the express purpose of taking her down town for a walk. Now that the latter knew that she was back in Billington again she felt quite keen to get a glimpse of the pleasant streets she once loved so dearly.

They walked on slowly; there was so much for Mrs. Atherton to see. When they had walked several blocks Dorothy could not contain herself any longer. There was some-

thing she wanted to tell the little white-haired woman, and the sooner the better.

At last she summoned up courage and exclaimed, somewhat nervously: "Mrs. Atherton, I have a great surprise in store for you, and I simply cannot keep the secret any longer."

"Surprise for me?" questioned the woman eagerly. "I hope it is good news."

"Very. You will be grateful I know."

"The other day you remember asking me about Dr. Mathers?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, you will be surprised no doubt to learn that the man who stood at your bedside many a day in the past—the man who performed the skillful operation that saved your life is no other than—"

"Charles Mathers," interrupted Mrs. Atherton, greatly agitated. She had almost expected it, but yet she hesitated. She could not believe it. It was all so very sudden. For a moment she grew dizzy and almost fell to the ground, but her companion held her in her arms.

"Yes," answered Dorothy, "he is the man."

"I can hardly believe it, Dorothy," gasped the woman. "It all seems so strange, and yet it can easily be true. It is years and

years since last I saw Charles, and it is only right to think that time has so changed him that I could never have hoped to recognize him. And then, he would never know me in my white hair. I am a different looking woman now. But how did I happen to fall into his hands?"

"In this way. I sang at a concert down in the slums. It was arranged by Father Salvini. Charles accompanied me to the place. You know we are engaged."

"You are engaged to marry Charles?" uttered Mrs. Atherton, in surprise. This was the second bit of news Dorothy had kept for her, and it was almost too much for the poor woman.

"It all sounds like a fairy tale," she said, "to think that I should have come to Billington, and that the boy, nearest to my heart, should have saved my life, and I not know him at all! God's ways are wonderful, Dorothy. Oh, I am so glad you are his betrothed, my darling. I never could understand why you should have taken such an interest in me, but now I see it all."

Mrs. Atherton was greatly interested in the girl's story.

"I met Charles after my return from Leipzig. It was love at first sight almost. You

know, Mrs. Atherton, the wedding-day is drawing very near."

"Is it really? Then I shall be in time for the wedding. It is glorious! glorious! After all God has been kind to me and everything will soon be made right in His own good time."

In this moment of joy Mrs. Atherton took Dorothy by the hand and shook it vigorously.

"Charles is away now," Dorothy went on. "I sent him off on purpose. I did not want him to meet you lest he might learn who you were. You see, that locket you gave Sister Angela gave me the first clew as to your identity. Step by step I followed it up until you told me you were Mrs. Atherton. Then I was positive that you were the woman whom Charles had been looking for all these years. Our wedding-day was drawing near, and I thought of arranging a surprise for Charles on this occasion. I did not want the matter to leak out so I contrived to get him away from Billington for a two months' holiday."

"You sly fox!" exclaimed Mrs. Atherton with a smile as they walked on.

"Charles believes you dead, Mrs. Atherton. Hardly a week passes but that I hear him mention your name. He often speaks of

his debt to you—the money that is still coming to you.”

“The dear boy!”

“Now I want you to cover up your identity for another few weeks,” Dorothy continued earnestly. “Tell your name to no one. Pretend that you do not remember it. If you meet any of your old friends whom you recognize, pass them by as so many strangers. It will not be for long. We will be married on the twenty-eighth of August, and on that day, at the wedding-breakfast, I intend bringing an end to all this hiding and mystery. Don’t you think it will be a pleasant climax to all these restless years of waiting. Father Salvini will be there and mother and father and other old friends of yours. Picture their surprise!” And she laughed girlishly.

“Then you have not even let your mother and father into the secret.”

“I have told no one save Sister Angela, and her lips are sealed. She has a heart of gold.”

“I promise you, Dorothy, I shall take all the precautions necessary to keep my affairs past and present to myself. But really, now that I know it all, I can hardly wait until the time arrives. Of course, I am to have a

seat of honor at the ceremony in church—eh?”

“Certainly, and at the wedding-breakfast as well. I am going to hide you in a room upstairs until the crisis arrives, and then I shall come for you and lead you into the room and introduce you as one newly risen from the dead. And best of all you will have to come and remain with us for the remainder of your days. With you back, believe me, it will be heaven for Charles.”

The two walked on slowly. The surprise-laden conversation had taken Mrs. Atherton's thoughts away from the many persons she passed on the street. She was just then living for Dorothy, Charles and herself and, in her mind, she could not help picturing the happy meeting which Dorothy had arranged so cleverly. As for the Past, she left those vast, dark, gloomy areas behind—never to set foot upon them again. She lived now in the living Present, her thoughts upon pleasant ways, redolent with rose-perfume, bright with sunshine and musical with the song of birds.

In passing Mrs. Atherton recognized familiar faces, all grown older since she had last looked upon them. But no one seemed to know her. The past had dealt too severely with her.



"Come, let us stop at mother's," Dorothy said lightly as they neared the Fairfax mansion. "She will be glad to see you."

"And I, too, shall be happy to look upon my old friend again and press her to—"

"Here! here!" exclaimed Dorothy, quickly. "I am afraid you are forgetting your promise. You must—"

"Oh, yes. I am to act the stranger—cold, cheerless, heartless—half-witted. I almost forgot."

"You must forget that you are Mrs. Atherton, that is all."

Dr. Mathers arrived home the last day of July, much benefited by his trip. The first patient he visited was Mrs. Atherton. He was still deeply interested in her case.

The patient came to meet him as he entered the room. Mrs. Atherton—poor, little woman — felt like rushing up to him and placing her arms about his manly neck and crying out her heart for very joy. She looked him up and down for a few minutes. She could not help it. Presently she noticed in his face a resemblance to the Charles she had known long ago. She felt like crying out to him: "Charles, Charles! I am Mrs. Atherton. Come to my arms! It was cruel of me to leave you, but I thought it all for the best."

Instantly her thoughts stole to Dorothy and she remembered her promise, and the words she would have spoken froze on her lips.

"Not yet! not yet!" she whispered to herself. "The time is near at hand and then my heart will be satisfied."

"I am glad to welcome you back, doctor, after your trip," she exclaimed nervously. "You look better since I saw you last."

"Is your mind clearing up faster now?"

"Somewhat, thanks. But the last few years are a perfect blank to me. I do not know how I happened to reach Billington and what occurred after I got here. They tell me I have been at St. Mary's going on two years now. It all seems like a dream to me. You have been very good to me, doctor. How can I ever repay you?"

"By coming and making your home with me for the remainder of your days. That is all I ask of you. Have you any children? Is your husband living?"

"No, I have not. My husband died years ago," she answered, in trembling voice.

"I wonder what his next question will be?" she thought. Mrs. Atherton was playing her part well. So far she had not betrayed her secret.

"Then you are free to accept my offer?"

"I am. You are very kind, and I shall think it over and let you know definitely in a few weeks. Will that do?"

In a few weeks! Just about the time that Dorothy Fairfax was to become the wife of Dr. Mathers.

\* \* \*

Mrs. Atherton kept her word, and, when at the wedding-breakfast she appeared in person with no less a chaperon than Dorothy, the charming bride herself, and was introduced to the merry guests grouped around, as the long lost benefactress of Charles' early days, the gentle reader can best picture the commotion — the intense surprise—the feelings of supreme joy that shone through smiles and tears, in the eyes of those, staring for the moment through the smilax and the orange-blossoms.

(THE END.)



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